

## Chapter 1: The Beginning

It had been two days since he left. Two excruciatingly long days. No matter how hard they tried to forget, they couldn't. The anger and the resentment was still palpable in the tent. Both occupants hated feeling this way. They had been through so much, and before this they had faced everything together, side-by-side. Now the third member of the illustrious trio had abandoned them in the middle of their most important mission.

Words never meant to be said were. Feelings and emotions that were never supposed to be let out exploded. The threesome was now a pair. Since the other left, no words had been spoken between the two that remained. It hurt too much they told themselves. Neither wanted to talk about it. That was what they assumed.

Harry was sitting at the front of the tent, staring lazily into the small fire that was burning in front of him. The warmth from it felt good on his face. It was nighttime, and the temperature was dropping steadily. It was his turn to keep guard while Hermione slept. At least she was trying. Harry thought she looked horrible since Ron left. It looked like she hadn't slept since. They both weren't eating well, and were deeply hurt that their best friend had given up on not only their mission, but also seemingly their friendship.

Harry pulled the Marauders Map out of his pocket, tapped it with his wand, and whispered, "I solemnly swear that I am up to no good." The ink on the old parchment spread out, laying out a map of Hogwarts. Little dots were milling about the school, but his eyes sought one in particular. He finally found it, and began watching Ginny's unmoving dot. 'She must be asleep,' he thought to himself.

The past year had been hard on Harry. Heck, his entire life had been hard. It seemed that he had finally found a girl that would truly make him happy in Ginny. Their relationship was but a dream to Harry, something that normal people had, not him. It was the most blissful month or so of his life. But after Dumbledore died, that dream was shattered into a million pieces. His life wasn't normal. His life wasn't blissful. His life was full of tragedy, of sorrow, and pain. Dumbledore's death was only the latest blow to his cared deeply for Ginny, 'That's

why I broke it off with her,' he kept telling himself. He wanted to keep her safe. He wished to have that feeling of a normal life back. But was it that he wished for, or was it Ginny? Was Ginny the reason for that feeling? He had nothing to compare the feeling too. Cho could hardly be considered a good comparison. Ginny kissed him passionately before he left the Burrow, which to him, meant that she wasn't ready to give up. That made Harry feel good, but it didn't answer any of his suspicions.

Harry was startled out of his thoughts by a sound coming from behind him. His heart sunk when he realized what it was. It was a sound he had heard a lot of in the past two days, yet he tried hard to ignore it. He didn't know why he did, because that would be what bad friends do. He hadn't tried to reach out. He didn't deal with situations like this very well, at least with Cho anyway.

It broke Harry's heart to hear Hermione crying again. He wanted to help, but didn't know how. Dealing with girls was bad enough, but crying girls? This was something that Harry dreaded. His first kiss had been a rather wet one with Cho crying. Their entire "relationship" was like that though. But an overriding thought permeated Harry's thoughts, 'Hermione's different, she's my best friend, I should do something,' he thought to himself over and over. That something however, he had no clue as to what. He turned his head and looked over his shoulder. His eyes found Hermione's bed. He saw the lump that was lying there, and watched as she was curled up, sobbing once more.

Harry continued to gaze upon her, and his thoughts continued to be of her. Hermione had always been there for him; this was just one more example on the long list. In a way, Ron was right. 'She did choose me over him.' She had stayed behind, to help him, Ron didn't. Hermione had always looked out for him, even when they disagreed. Those times brought them closer together, because it proved nothing could come between them. Harry thought back to all the disagreements he and Hermione had had over the course of their first year. She had persisted that the Firebolt could be cursed. She had argued that Sirius Black, who was apparently searching for Harry to kill him, could have sent it. It turned out she was both right and wrong.

It was sent by Sirius, not to curse or kill him, but to make up for all the holidays he had missed by being imprisoned in Azkaban for all those years.

In their fifth year, Hermione constantly pushed Harry to practice his Occlumency. Had he listened to her, Harry thought that perhaps his godfather wouldn't have died that night. And just last year, they had bickered over the use of the potions book that once belonged to the "Half-Blood Prince". But all their little spats always came down to one thing: Hermione cared for Harry's safety.

Harry couldn't help but think, 'What have I done for her? What have I done to deserve that kind of... affection from her?' He stopped to think about that word: affection. No one had ever showed him affection before her. No one had cared for him like that before her. Sure, Ron was his first friend, but it was Hermione that was always looking out for him. His well-being was always number one for her. 'How have I ever showed her that I cared for her?'

He focused once more on the trembling form on the small bed in the tent. And then it hit him like a bludger to the head. 'She needs me right now. I have to show her the same affection she's showed me over these years.' Harry put away his map, and got up from his sitting position. He quietly closed the front of the tent so that they could have privacy. He walked softly over to her bed, and a lump in his throat appeared when he saw her up close. She was curled up in a ball, facing away from the front of the tent, her arms wrapped around one of her pillows, squeezing it tightly against her chest. Streaks of dried tears from the past two days were on her cheek, her hair a mess of tangles, her eyes closed, pushing out more tears. He watched her body rise and fall as she inhaled and exhaled.

He saw a small patch of bed to sit on right behind her back. He moved over to her, putting a hand on her shoulder, and sat down uncomfortably on the edge of the bed. He felt her tense up when he touched her. She sniffled, and tried to compose herself now that he had sat next to her. His hip was pushing slightly against the small of her back, and he began to gently rub her shoulder, and slowly made its way down her left arm. Harry swallowed hard and forced himself to speak.

“Hermione, is there anything I can do for you?”

Several seconds passed. It seemed like she either didn't hear him, or was ignoring him, he couldn't tell which. He continued to rub her arm and her shoulder. After several more seconds of silence, he decided that maybe she didn't want to say anything. He turned himself so that both his hands could touch her. His left hand kept rubbing and massaging her arm and shoulder. He took his right hand and placed it on her back. His thumb began moving in a small circular motion, and he started to gently move it up and down her back. His left hand then moved up to her neck, and then began to massage the back of her neck and slowly moved up into her brown, bushy locks. He crept up further into her hair, moving his fingers slowly and kneading the back of her head.

Her hair felt soft as he ran his fingers through it. He smiled, pondering this new sensation. 'I could certainly get used to this,' he thought. He had never run his hands through a girl's hair before. Sure, he had touched Ginny's hair while kissing her, but he never had done this before. Running his hands through Hermione's hair felt wonderful, relaxing even.

He continued to give her the best massage he could, inexperienced as he was at it. Finally, after keeping this massage up for a while, he felt her relax. Feeling her relax caused him to smile again, hoping that his attempt at comforting her had helped. She pushed her head back into his hand, silently approving of his actions, even moving her head slightly to change the position of his hand on her scalp. Harry was more than happy to oblige, continuing to move his hand all over, scratching and kneading her. He took his right hand off her back, intending to move up to join the other. As he did so however, she groaned, making it clear she was also enjoying that as well. He couldn't help but smile, and brought his hand down again to rub her back. 'It feels good to help out Hermione for once,' he thought to himself.

He continued for what seemed to be an eternity before his hands started to cramp on him. He tried pushing through the pain, and did so for a few minutes, but he needed to stop soon after. She sighed

once more, sad to feel him stop, but Harry could tell that she felt better now than when he started.

In a barely audible whisper, Harry heard her say, "Mmmh, Harry... you stopped..." a small smile appearing on her face for the first time since Ron left.

He leaned over so his lips were near her ear. "Sorry, but my hands were cramping," he whispered back to her. She chuckled lightly as a small shiver ran down her back. She felt his warm breath on her neck as he whispered in her ear. "I don't know if you heard me before, but is there anything I can do for you?"

Hermione thought it over for a moment before coming to a conclusion. "Well, since your hands need a rest," she began, a little smirk on her face. She shifted her body, her face returning to its same sad look from before Harry had starting massaging her. In a sorrowful, pleading voice, she continued, "Could you just hold me?"

Without another word, Harry moved to lie beside her. She scooted over on the small, twin bed, to allow him some room. He flung his legs onto the bed, and slid his right arm under her neck. She lifted her head to allow him to get as close as possible to her before laying back down. He put his left arm over her abdomen as she let go of her pillow so he could fully wrap his arms around her. After moving their bodies to meld together, he pulled her tightly against his body.

He felt her pushing against him, as if she were trying to become one with him. Her arms were around his, holding herself in his embrace. He could feel her pain; feel the weight on her shoulders. He couldn't help but think that it was his fault. If he had been more forward with Dumbledore, asking more questions, getting answers, then maybe Ron wouldn't have walked out on them. He had failed as their leader. He didn't plan well enough. If it weren't for Hermione, there would be no plan, no supplies, no nothing. In fact, if it weren't for her, he would be dead many times over. 'Have I ever even thanked her properly?' And a big idea came to Harry at that moment. No one ever seemed to say nice things to Hermione. She was constantly verbally abused by Malfoy, bickering with Ron, and helping Harry. Nothing was ever about Hermione. Harry decided, right here and now, to change that.

"Hermione?" he whispered, his lips less than an inch from her ear. She made a quiet "Mmm?" sound, imploring him to continue.

"I want you to know, I'm always here for you, no matter what. I don't want you to feel you have to hide anything from me, and I don't want to hide anything from you. You're my best friend; you've always been by my side. You've always looked out for me. Everything you've ever done was because you cared about me. And you've done it without asking for anything in return. So, I wanted to, from the bottom of my heart, say thank you, for everything." He squeezed her tightly, trying to physically convey what he had just said. She in turn pulled Harry's arms as hard as she could into herself. After a few tender moments, they let themselves relax.

"Oh Harry, that's sweet, but you didn't need to say anything," she replied, smiling, and trying to hold back the tears. But these tears weren't of sadness or loss, but of happiness and joy, not that the teenage wizard holding her knew the difference.

"No, I do need to say something. I hardly ever hear someone compliment you outside of calling you smart. You should know that you are fantastically brilliant and intelligent. But there are other things you should know. You're cute and beautiful, and yes, there's a difference. Cute, because there are so many little things you do, like biting your lower lip when you're nervous or deep in thought. Beautiful, because even when you're not trying, you are. And when you dress up, Merlin knows you look amazing. The Yule Ball? Wow. Just wow."

"Harry! Stop it, you're going to make me cry again."

All of a sudden, the color drained from Harry's face. This was the last thing he wanted to hear from Hermione. He wanted to bring her comfort and make her feel better. He didn't want to make her cry again. He didn't know what exactly he had said wrong, but it must have been something.

"I'm sorry Hermione, I didn't want to upset you. I'm sorry." He began to pull his arms away from her and roll off the bed, but he couldn't.

She didn't let him. She clung to him with all her might. She wasn't about to let go of this man, not right now.

"No, don't go! And don't apologize!" she said with a suddenness and determination in her voice. She turned her head, which caused her body to lean even more into his, so that she could look him in the eye. "I'm sorry that I implied you were upsetting me. You weren't. You were just being... so sweet..." she said softly as her cheeks began to flush. "No one has ever said something like that to me. I'm afraid if you compliment me anymore the waterworks will start again," she chuckled as she kissed him on the cheek, and laid her head back on the pillow.

"But you should hear it. I've known you how many years and I haven't said anything?" Hermione chuckled again and shrugged her shoulders, snuggling closer to him. Harry pondered his next thought, debating whether it was really true. He compared Ginny to Hermione.

Ginny was pretty, and it seemed all the boys wanted to date her. She had chosen to date three guys, Michael Corner, Dean Thomas, and himself. Harry thought that he by far was the least good looking of the three, but the fact that he was 'Harry Potter' made up that difference to Ginny. Hermione though, was never complimented on her looks. She had looked stunning at the Yule Ball, and at Bill and Fleur's wedding. 'But she is good looking, Harry thought. 'It's more of a subtle beauty.' He remembered talking to her after his disastrous date with Cho, when he told her that he didn't think she was ugly. He now was regretting saying that, because he should have told her that she was good looking, not just "not ugly".

Hermione always wanted to make sure Harry was taken care of, no matter what. She was always there to lend a helping hand. What about Ginny? Sure, she tried occasionally, but it was always Hermione that was able to make him feel a few moments, he thought nothing could be truer than what he was about to say. "You know, I wouldn't choose any other girl over you Hermione," he said matter-of-factly.

Hermione blushed fiercely and her ears went pink at Harry's comment. "What do you mean by that Harry?" she asked incredulously.

"I meant exactly what I said. There is no other girl that I would choose over you, no matter what. It's a big part of why Cho and I didn't work. She was jealous of how close we are. And there is no way I'm going to let some girl come between us. We've done and shared things that no one else could possibly understand. There's a special bond between us, and anyone that tries to break it is sorely mistaken. You're special to me Hermione, more so than anyone else in this world." Harry gave her a quick squeeze, reaffirming what he had just admitted to her. She sniffled, fighting back more tears, but smiling widely.

"And when did you become a mature, suave young man who tries to woo all the ladies?" she asked trying to keep a straight face while she teased him. "Where did the Harry I know go? The one that could barely talk to girls? The one who would rather face a Hungarian Horntail than ask a girl to the Yule Ball? Is this the new Harry, Ginny's Harry?" she finished while giving in to a small fit of laughter.

Harry felt a stinging in his heart, and shifted uncomfortably at the mention of the G-word, which would undoubtedly lead to the R-word. He sighed, knowing that the conversation would eventually lead to this. He tried keeping an even toned voice, not wanting to show too much emotion.

"No, same old Harry. Like I said, I don't want to hide anything from you," he said as he tried to ignore the fact that she had brought up his latest ex-girlfriend. Much to his dismay however, it seemed this was a topic she wanted to explore.

"How are things with you and Ginny? I know you two broke up, but it certainly seems like you still have feelings for each other judging by that kiss before the wedding," she said, trying to keep a neutral tone.

"Well, I don't know. I do care about her, a lot actually. She's of course very pretty, and an excellent kisser. But," Harry sighed, feeling a huge weight in his heart. He did have feelings for Ginny, but how deep did



they really run? He continued, "I don't know. It just seems like the time I was with her was like out of someone else's life."

"Is that a good thing or a bad thing?"

"See, that's the part I don't know about. I don't have anything to really compare it to. I certainly don't count Cho as a true experience. And whenever Ginny and I talk, it's always about her, or the great things I've done, or unimportant things. Plus there was what she said to me before that kiss. She acted like I was going out to try and date some random girl while I was doing this mission. The kiss was something to 'remember her' by, like she was trying to put a ring on my finger already."

Harry sighed again, and let the words hang two laid in silence for the next few minutes. Harry didn't know where else to take the conversation, so he just let it drop. If Hermione wanted to know anything else, he guessed that she would ask. He thought about Ginny and his earlier comment about Cho being jealous of him and Hermione. Suddenly it seemed to dawn on him why Ginny acted like she did. 'She's jealous! Jealous of Hermione and me! That's got to be it! She knew that the three of us would be going alone, and she knows how close I am to Hermione. There's no other rational explanation.'

He decided to see if Hermione thought the same. "Do you think Ginny's jealous of us?"

Hermione shrugged her shoulders. "I don't know, I suppose she could be if what you say is true. I know she's at least a little jealous of me for being so close to you. Whether she's jealous of us?" She thought about it for a moment before continuing. "I guess so. If she's jealous of me, that means she's jealous of our, for lack of a better term, relationship. She wants what I have with you. Not that I blame her. I think a lot of girls at Hogwarts, and beyond for that matter, are jealous of me."

She smiled widely again. Harry chuckled at her observation and thought of the position they were currently in, which made him laugh out loud. "What are you laughing at Mr. Potter?"

"Think about it Ms. Granger. How many girls would give up magic all together to swap places with you right now? Cuddling with the Boy-Who-Lived?" After a slight pause, Hermione burst out laughing herself, and snuggled up against Harry.

They both had to wipe away the tears of laughter that were coming from their eyes. They continued to randomly chuckle for the next few minutes. Finally, Harry swallowed hard, and decided to broach the "Ron" topic, though he thought he should ease into it. "Well, we've talked about my love life, how about yours?"

Hermione sighed and closed her eyes, knowing what Harry was referring to. Her body slightly stiffened as she began, "If you mean Ron and I, there is no love life to speak of, not anymore." Harry knew she was very upset at Ron leaving, but decided to try and tease her about it. 'Perhaps I can get her to lighten up and relax if I tease her a little about it.'

"Oh, so she admits there was something then?" he said, trying to let her know he was only teasing her about it. She seemed to understand, and apparently decided to go along with it.

"Yes, there was something, but after what he did, definitely not anymore. We were never official or anything, just mutual attraction I suppose. It's like you said earlier, nothing can come between you and I, not even Ron I guess. I'd always catch him glaring at us when we talked alone. Plus what he started to say about you behind your back, I just couldn't understand it. It could have been the Horcrux talking, but he'd still say things when he didn't have it on."

She sighed, remembering some of the awful things Ron said about his best friend, deeply disappointed in how he had acted. Seconds passed before she spoke again.

"I guess Ron was right, I did choose you over him. There was no way I was going to leave you to do this on your own, wannabe boyfriend or not," she said with bitterness in her voice. Hermione was on the verge of crying once more, but with a gentle squeeze from Harry, the feeling subsided.

"I guess the youngest Weasley's aren't too happy with us at the moment are they?" Harry said, trying to lighten the mood once more.

"I suppose not," she responded flatly. After hearing the tone of her response, Harry knew not to push it any two of them laid in silence for a long while after the "Ron" subject. Harry felt good holding Hermione close to him. He let random thoughts rush through his brain. He tried desperately to not think about Ron, Ginny, or the hunt for Horcruxes. He just wanted to relish this moment with Hermione.

He was particularly enjoying the smell of her hair. The light vanilla scent seemed to fit her personality: not too strong or overpowering, but wonderful to those who notice its there. Just like Hermione. She believes herself to be ordinary and plain, vanilla as they say. But to those who aren't looking for the shiny, the over-the-top, or the extreme, vanilla is perfect.

Harry knew what he wanted out of life; he wanted to be normal, have a family, and live the quiet life. He didn't want the fame or the attention. He wanted his eventual wife to love Harry, not the Boy-Who-Lived. He would raise his children to be levelheaded, to not let his own fame cloud their judgment, to keep them humble, and wanted his wife to feel the same way.

His thoughts wandered again to Hermione. She truly was the one girl he cared most about in the world. He stopped to ponder for a moment what dating her would be like. He never took the time to think about it before, mostly because of his infatuation with Cho and his brief relationship with Ginny. He let his mind wander, and it came around to an image of kissing her. To his great surprise, it didn't look weird or forced, which would have been his assumption, but instead was tender and loving. He never felt that way when he imagined kissing Ginny.

He then thought about a wedding, much like Bill and Fleur's, but instead it's of his and Hermione's. He could easily imagine her walking down the aisle towards him, wearing a white, long, flowing wedding dress with a near-transparent veil covering her lovely face. He thought of what potential children with her would look like. 'Would

they have her brown hair or my black? Would it be bushy or all over the place? Brown or green eyes? Bookworm or a Quidditch player? Perhaps both?'

He couldn't help but smile at the image of a young boy, with brown hair sticking up all over the place, bright green eyes, running from the library down to the Hogwarts Quidditch pitch. He had never had these types of thoughts before, but they brought a feeling of joy to him. He let the warmth of his thoughts linger as he lay beside Hermione.

It had been a couple hours since he had come over and comforted her, yet the time passed by quickly. He was really enjoying this experience with her. He had never really cuddled with a girl before. Sure, he and Ginny had cuddled a couple times on the couch in the Gryffindor common room, but that always felt awkward. He never knew where to put his hands when they laid on the couch together. Here, with Hermione, none of that awkwardness came. He felt like it was completely natural to be holding her.

As the time passed by, Harry thought about how long it had been since he had actually sat and talked with Hermione. A question he had always wanted to ask her was now bugging him. She seemed to be the only person who he could ask, not just because of proximity, but how close their friendship was.

"Hermione, am I fancy-able? And I mean me, the moody, sulky, stubborn, insufferable git who puts off work until the last second and have you bail me out, me. Not the Quidditch Seeker, Boy-Who-Lived and young-man-everyone-loves guy who people think I am?"

Hermione seemed quite taken aback at Harry's question. She didn't think about it long, and was quick to answer him, "Of course Harry. Any girl who you choose to fancy should be happy you've chosen her," she said matter-of-factly. Harry's forwardness seemed to have rubbed off on her, and she decided to follow his lead. "What about me? Am I fancy-able?"

Harry seemed just as taken aback as Hermione was at the question. "Yes, you are. Any bloke you give five minutes of your time to should consider himself lucky." Harry chuckled, thinking how completely true

his statement was, especially when it pertained to him. How lucky had he been to meet her, and that she was such a devoted friend. She had stood by his side more times than he could possibly count. She had helped him with everything, from schoolwork to the Triwizard tournament to Cho.

He couldn't help but sigh a little, thinking of how wonderful a girl Hermione really was. Deciding to keep this little banter up, and just to see how she'd react, he prodded her some more. "So, do you fancy me Hermione?" he said with a smirk on his face.

Her jaw dropped slightly again at the forwardness of Harry's question. Her voice was caught in her throat, unsure of how to respond. Finally, she choked out, "What do you mean by 'fancy'?"

Harry tried to keep his laughter inside, and enjoyed her reaction to his question. "I mean, would you ever ask me to go with you to Hogsmeade?" Again, Hermione was stunned. After a few seconds though, she noticed the tinge in Harry's voice, and made the decision that the best defense was a good offense. She stiffened her resolve, deciding to enter this fray willingly, and started to tussle with him verbally.

"Well, Mr. Potter, I've asked you to go with me to Hogsmeade several times I do believe," she said rather smugly, thinking she had stung him just a little. Now, she was determined to go in for the kill. "But you're always dragging Ron along, so I think you're trying to avoid us going alone. I get the feeling you don't fancy me. So I've given up on you. You're just a hopeless case to me at this point." She smirked to herself, thinking that she had gotten the best of him. But, she was quite wrong. Harry smiled, thinking of the different reactions she could possibly have to his retort.

"So, what you're saying is, if I asked you, right now, to be my girlfriend, you'd say no? Am I understanding you correctly?" Harry wished he could see the look on her face. He imagined her looking like a fish out of water, gasping for breath, and he wasn't too far from the truth.

Hermione was sputtering, trying to form some sort of coherent thought. After a few seconds, she replied as confidently as her quivering voice could. "Sorry Harry, that ship has sailed," she said, shrugging her shoulders.

Harry, forgetting about their little game, had sadness in his eyes. He felt like he was kicked in the stomach. He was thankful she had her back to him so she didn't see it. "Oh," he said, pitifully and unable to hide the disappointment in his voice. He inwardly kicked himself for bringing this up. Somehow, his heart fluttered when he thought of Hermione saying 'yes' to his question. Her answer also had a duality to it he couldn't help but notice though. She was saying 'no' to him, but it seemed she was implying that at one time, she would have said 'yes', which only added to the disappointment. 'Oh my, she would have said yes to me? When? I can't believe it...'

Slowly, it seemed to dawn on Harry. He knew that no other girl could come close to being Hermione. No other girl could possibly understand him like her. He could never find another girl he would ever feel this way about. He wanted her to say 'yes' so badly right now. He wanted to drop this façade, this game that they were playing. He couldn't believe that he had a chance with her, and because of his ignorance, had missed that opportunity.

Harry laid there for what seemed like an eternity. He didn't know how to bring it up. Every scenario played out horribly in his head. How does one ask out their best friend, especially when she just said no? Did she say 'no' in the context of the banter they were having? Was she trying to hide her feelings? Harry had never been able to read girls very well. 'Perhaps,' he thought, 'now is the time for the direct approach again.' He nudged her lightly as it seemed she was dozing off. "Hermione?"

She replied with a sleepy, "Eh?" or at least that's what it sounded like.

He leaned over so that his mouth was right next to her ear, and whispered, "Will you be my girlfriend?"

It took several moments for the words to register in her brain. She shook her head in seeming disbelief, and asked, "What did you say?"

Harry breathed deeply this time, steadying his nerves. For some reason, the last time he said it he wasn't nervous. But now, having to say it again made him so and made it much more real. "I said... Will you be my girlfriend?"

The words seemed to echo throughout the tent, and rung loudly in Harry's ears. He gazed at her, trying to judge her reaction. She simply laid there, snuggled up to him once more, and in a calm, nonchalant voice said, "Oh Harry, I thought we were finished with that little game."

He looked at her, quite confused. Of all the reactions that he thought she would have, this reaction was not one of them. He wracked his brain for a reason why she was so composed about it. 'Well, this isn't what I expected,' he thought. He decided to make it completely obvious as to the meaning of his scooted away from her a little bit, just enough so that when he pulled her towards him she was at an angle. She groaned at her source of warmth moving away from her, and turned to look at Harry. He took his left hand and gently cupped the right side of her face, making sure he could look directly into her eyes. With all his Gryffindor courage, he did it again.

"No Hermione, no games. I mean it. Would you be my girlfriend? You're everything a bloke could want, and you know me so well. I would be honored to be with you, to be your boyfriend," he said with a trembling voice. She blinked rapidly at him, her mind trying to process what he had said. Her jaw slacked, and her mouth fell slightly open. Her voice seemed to have disappeared. She was, at this moment, the very definition of the term shell-shocked.

Harry's heart started to race, afraid that he had crossed some line in their friendship. He could see something in her eyes though, what it was, he wasn't quite sure. It wasn't hate, or dislike, or annoyance. They started out looking wide in confusion, but then they focused, slowly turning into something else, something he had seen before. He had seen that look only once or twice before, and it was always for just a fleeting moment. He never saw it when she looked at Ron, only when she looked at him. It wasn't something he could put into words. Her eyes just seemed to sparkle, but this was the first time he had

ever seen it up close. He felt like he could stare into them for all eternity. For some reason, this look in her eyes made him grin from ear to ear. The nervousness he felt washed away. She had yet to speak, but he felt completely at ease.

She turned her body over so that she could feel more comfortable looking at him. Her left arm was tucked underneath her, but her right hand came up to his face and caressed his cheek. She had a broad smile on her face, and she was glowing for the first time in ages. She opened her mouth to speak, but nothing came out. She chuckled to herself, appearing to laugh at her own nervousness. She swallowed hard and steadied herself.

“Harry... are you serious?” His heart was beating quickly, and all he could do was nod feverishly. Her eyes began to fill with pure joy, and she responded, “Then yes, I'd love to be your girlfriend,” smiling widely.

Harry couldn't help himself from nearly splitting his face into two parts with his smile. He leaned over her and brushed his lips lightly against hers, silently asking permission to kiss her. She chuckled, and leaned her head up so that her lips met his. It was a soft, tender, and loving kiss. It was everything that Harry thought a kiss should be. It wasn't hard and fast, nor wet and sloppy. This was all together a different feeling. This wasn't some dream or some altered state. This was bliss. This was ecstasy.

This was... Vanilla.



## Chapter 2: A Doe and a Weasley

Shivering, biting coldness. Little food. Pitch black forest. Moonless night. Not the best of conditions to survive in. But the couple sitting in front of a small tent, cuddling together by the warm fire, seemed rather content considering their situation.

Both looked the worse for wear. Dark circles were under their eyes, indicating a lack of sleep. Their stomachs were growling in hunger. The flicker of firelight was visible in their eyes. A light snowfall was cascading down upon them and was sticking in their hair.

They were both sitting on a dark blue blanket, their knees pressed against their chests. Harry had his left arm around Hermione, pulling her in tightly against him, trying to share warmth. She had both hands wrapped around Harry's free hand, occasionally rubbing it for some cheap friction heat. Her head was tucked into the crook of his shoulder. Another blue blanket was draped around them, shielding them from falling snow.

Harry looked down at the girl in his arms, and couldn't help but smile. 'What won't this girl do for me?' he thought, taking his right hand out of hers and rubbed his chest over his heart, where there was now an oval shaped scar. As he did so, she shifted her head, and noticed where he was rubbing. She put her hand over his, and intertwined their fingers.

"I'm so sorry Harry..." she said, sniffing as her nose was running from being cold. Harry leaned his head down, softly kissing her forehead, and then pressed his against hers. He stared deeply into her eyes, which were filled with sorrow, remorse, regret, and something else... but what he didn't know.

"Hermione, I wouldn't be alive if it weren't for you. I owe you everything. You have nothing to be sorry for. It should be me apologizing to you, for putting you in danger like that... I...mmph" he said, but was abruptly cut off by his lips being crushed by hers, causing his glasses to be pushed askew on the bridge of his nose. After releasing his lips, she smiled widely.

"I will, willingly, walk with you into a mob of Dementors and Death Eaters, and not think twice about it. And I know that you don't want me in danger, but if you think I came all this way to leave you when it matters most, then you're just as delusional as Romilda Vane," she said, and both chuckled at the mention of the obsessed girl who always seemed to fancy Harry, though he paid no attention to her.

Harry was in awe of the spirit and loyalty emanating from the girl in his arms. What made him smile even broader, was the fact that she meant every word, and would fight him if he were to ever try and shut her out. He gave her a quick peck on her forehead, and then on her lips.

"And I know that if I tried to push you away, you'd just hex me and tell me what a complete prat I was being," he said as they both chuckled. She simply smiled and nodded, affirming his accusation. He sighed, and continued. "When I broke up with Ginny, I thought she'd fight me, beg me not to. But she didn't. At the time, I was glad. I don't know if I could have kept it up. But now, with you, it makes me wonder why she didn't."

"I don't know," Hermione shrugged. "Maybe she thought by letting you be the hero again, it was the way to your heart. But if you try that stunt with me, I'll make sure your new roommate will be Gilderoy Lockhart," she said, batting her eyelashes and a sickeningly sweet smile on her face. He couldn't help but laugh as he leaned over and kissed her.

"I don't know what I'd do without you Hermione," he smiled as she put her head back into the crook of his shoulder. He laid his head on top of hers, and they sat in that position, in front of the warm fire for quite awhile before he spoke again. "Hey, why don't you try and get some sleep? I'll keep watch. It's a pretty quiet night."

"Ok, I'll try. But you know I don't sleep well when you're not there. I've gotten used to my big teddy bear keeping the scary monsters away," she said teasingly as she unwrapped herself from the blanket. She kissed him on the cheek, and went inside the tent.

Harry turned his attention back to the fire, watching the flames flicker and dance as his thoughts drifted to a multitude of topics. He wondered how exactly he and Hermione were going to destroy the locket. They had decided that it was best not to wear it anymore, agreeing it did no good to do so. Losing Ron was hard; losing each other would be devastating. 'I don't want to lose her, ever...'

After a while, Harry thought about how Ron and Ginny would take the unexpected news of his relationship with Hermione. He hoped that they would understand, but he knew that a rough spot would ensue before things would be righted, if ever. He knew that Ron fancied Hermione, and had for a long time. And judging by her reaction last year to the snog fest that happened between Ron and Lavender, it appeared the feeling was mutual. Hermione didn't elaborate on her feelings for Ron since the night they decided on being a couple, and Harry didn't pry. He decided that ignorance was truly bliss in this matter. What mattered now was that she was his girlfriend, and she made him happy.

Something that both bothered and excited him at the same time were his growing feelings toward Hermione. His current relationship had now lasted just over a week longer than his previous one. And yet his feelings were immensely more intense now than they ever were for Ginny. He thought quite a bit about just why this was. What it boiled down to it seemed, was the bond that was already there with Hermione, was now intensified ten fold.

His new relationship was amazing. Harry and Hermione both worried about the same thing when they started: that their recently developed romantic feelings would compromise their wonderful friendship and comfortableness. Luckily for them, their worries were quite unfounded. Their newfound intimacy only served to greatly increase the strength of their bond. Now they were learning things about each other they never knew before.

Harry enjoyed running his hands through Hermione's sometimes-uncontrollable hair. He loved waking up and smelling her vanilla scented locks. She had a giggle that he never heard before, which made his heart flutter every time he heard it. He noticed the different ways her face contorted when she bit her lower lip; whether it be

reading a book, being nervous about something, or feeling slightly amused by him: each one had a different accompanying look, but always with that trademark lip biting.

He thought back to just a couple of weeks prior, to Godric's Hollow. She had saved his life. She tended to his wounds, and nursed him back to relative health. She stood along side him, holding his hand, when they found his parents graves. They laid a Christmas wreath and a bouquet of lilies on the tombstones. He introduced his parents to Hermione, talking to them as if they were there. He told them how wonderful she was, and how proud he was of her. As they were leaving, they stopped beneath the kissing gate to share a tender kiss.

Harry continued to gaze into the flames; only the sound of the crackling fire accompanied him until he saw something move. It was bright, whatever it was. 'It can't be...' he thought to himself. But there, standing in a small clearing, was a doe. Not just any doe, but a patronus. Its eyes were staring directly at Harry, piercing his own. 'Surely, no Death Eater has a doe for a patronus, it must be someone from the Order.'

He cast aside the warm blanket, and ran towards the doe. With Hermione's wand, he cast a 'Lumos' spell, needing the light on this moonless night. Much to his dismay, the doe ran. 'Why is my life so bloody hard? Why can't it just sit there and help me?' Harry thought as he ran after the glowing patronus, running through branches and bushes, which were constantly whipping him in the face. He threw up his arms, trying to deflect the wooden weapons that were in his way.

Finally, the doe stopped near a small pond, which was frozen over. Harry looked down at the sheet of ice, and saw below it, the Sword of Gryffindor. 'Bloody hell! The Sword! But... how?' He looked around for the source of the patronus, but could see hardly anything. The doe provided enough light to see the glistening jewels of the sword below.

Harry knew he couldn't simply summon the sword, seeing as it was under a thick sheet of ice. Thinking quickly, he pointed his borrowed wand at the ice right above the sword, and casted a fire spell, trying to melt the ice. 'Come on, come on... I'm freezing my bloody bollocks off here...' Finally, the small blue flame fell through the ice. Much to

Harry's disappointment, the hole that was caused by the flame, while large enough to stick his arm down, was not nearly big enough for the sword. 'Posh. This is ridiculous.' Harry stared at the small hole, wondering just how he was going to get the sword.

"Isn't it easier to catch fish when there's water, not ice?" a voice Harry hadn't heard in over a month said from the surrounding darkness. His head snapped around, and saw a tall, lanky red-head staring at him, half confused and half amused. A huge smile grew on Harry's face as he ran over to the boy standing just off the ice.

"Ron! What are you doing here? How'd you find us?" Harry asked excitedly.

"Long story mate. Just what are you doing out here on an icy pond in the middle of nowhere?" Harry reached out and grabbed Ron's arm and dragged him over to the spot he had been standing in. He pointed to the hole he had made, and Ron's eyes bugged out. "Woah, is that...?"

"Yeah, the Sword of Gryffindor. Mind giving me a hand getting it?" Harry asked, a small smile cracking his face. Ron nodded enthusiastically. Both of them pointed their wands towards the ice, both casting the fire spell, melting the ice. Soon, the hole was large enough to dive into.

Harry threw off his clothes, down to his boxers, handed his glasses to Ron, and jumped in. The water was freezing cold, causing Harry to shiver violently. The sword wasn't very deep, but would require him to dive under water to get it. He took a couple of deep breaths, trying to steady his shaking body, and submerged himself. He flipped over, swimming downward. The coldness of the water was taking its toll on Harry, causing his fingers and toes to go numb. His hands grabbed for the hilt, and he pulled upwards. The sword came easily, and Harry made for the surface.

As soon as he broke through, he screamed, "Cold, really cold!" as he let out a huge gasp. Ron laid down on the ice, and reached out his right hand toward Harry. Harry grabbed onto his friend's arm with a death grip, his other hand was still clutching the sword. Ron pulled

with all his might to get Harry out of the water. Harry slid on the ice, and quickly stood up. Ron conjured a towel and a blanket to wrap Harry in.

Ron picked up Harry's clothes, handed back his glasses, and the two of them made their way back towards the tent, where the once roaring fire was now barely going. With a flick of Hermione's wand, Harry put a couple more logs on the fire, which returned it to its former glory. They had walked in silence back to the tent, unsure of what to say to each other, both feeling resentment and remorse.

Harry was excited at first to see Ron, but now he felt uncomfortable, knowing what laid ahead. He remembered the intensity of that night. He wanted to yell and scream at Ron, but there was something else that was bothering him more. Ron had hurt Hermione. Badly. Now, here he was, hoping to make amends with her. But she was Harry's girlfriend now. 'How is he going to take it? Will he leave again?'

Harry reached to opening of the tent, and turned to face Ron. "Stay out here for a little bit, I don't know if Hermione is too keen on seeing your face right now." Ron simply nodded, his face showing his inner depression. He knew what he had done; he was only hoping now to right his wrongs.

As Harry walked into his temporary home, he used Hermione's wand to light the small lanterns that were around the tent. He looked over to the bed that he and her had been sharing since Ron left. She was curled up under the blankets, facing away the entrance of the tent, but he could tell that she wasn't asleep. He watched her body rise and fall as she inhaled and exhaled. It wasn't the rhythmic pattern of her deep sleep, but the chaotic stuttering of her restless kips. He dried himself with the towel Ron had conjured, and dressed himself in clean clothes. He heard her stirring in bed, and she turned over to look at him.

Hermione's eyes were squinting due to the light. She looked over at Harry and smiled. "Why did you light the lanterns?" she asked in a sleepy, raspy voice.

"I have a couple presents for you," he said, picking up the Sword of Gryffindor that he had set on the floor while he was dressing himself. At first glance, she didn't recognize it, but after a few seconds, she threw off her blankets and sat up quickly, her eyes wide in shock. "Yes Hermione, it's the sword."

"Where did you get it?" she asked excitedly. Harry sat down on the bed next to her, and she threw her legs out from under the blankets and over the edge of the bed. She scooted right next to him, a big smile on her face.

"Well, before I say, I have something else to show you. An even bigger surprise," he said while nodding his head towards the front of the tent. He then shouted, "Come on in!" She looked at him with a raised eyebrow, curious as to why he was yelling. Just then, the tent opened, and Ron walked in.

Ron and Hermione's eyes met for the first time. A look of shame and sorrow filled the bright blue eyes of the youngest male Weasley. But a completely different look would describe the young witch sitting beside Harry. She coldly stared at the redheaded one. Her eyebrows narrowed, which in the dim light, made her look scarier than the Dark Lord himself. She got up, and stiffly walked towards Ron. Her steps were loud and thunderous, stomping all the way across the tent. She stopped right in front of him, an arms length away, her eyes boring into him, a scowl firmly etched on her face. He tried to give her a faint smile.

**SMACK!**

Hermione's right hand met Ron's cheek with all the force she could muster. She brought her hand up and examined it as he brought a hand to his face, lightly touching where she had connected.

"I'm considering slapping you again, but my bloody hand stings too much at the moment," Hermione growled through her teeth. Harry quickly got up and raced over to his two friends. He stood next to them, not wanting any more physicality to go on.

"Listen, before we have a knock-down, drag-out row, I'd like to make sure this is the real sword, and I'd like to destroy the Horcrux if you don't mind?" Harry said in a calm tone. His two friends looked at him, then back to each other. A silent truce was agreed to after a few seconds. Harry walked over to the locket, which if he didn't know any better, seemed to be trembling. He picked it up off the chair it was laying on, conjured a simple, flat table, and set the Horcrux on it.

"Alright, I might need your help. I'm going to open it."

"How Harry? We've yet to even figure that out!" Hermione reasoned.

"I think I know how. Simple really, now that I think about it." Both of his friends looked at him inquisitively. "It's Slytherin's locket, right?" Both nodded. "Ok, the Chamber of Secrets was created by him, and the only way to access it was to speak Parseltongue. I'm guessing this is similar. So get ready, I don't know what to expect." Harry turned his attention back to the locket. Closing his eyes, he imagined a snake coiled up on the table. And in Parseltongue, he said, "Open."

As his eyes reopened, nothing could prepare him for what he saw. The locket had opened, and inside were two glass windows. Hiding behind them, were the red, penetrating eyes of Tom Riddle. A low, hissing sound began to emanate from the locket.

"Yesss... Harry Potter..." Harry stared directly into Riddle's eyes, and brought the sword high over his head, ready to strike down and destroy the Horcrux. "Harry Potter... what is your weakness? Ah yes... love... you know in your mind that no one loves you... Dumbledore used you... the Weasley boy abandoned you... the Weasley girl let you leave... the Granger girl is only using you to get over her own heartbreak... no... no one loves the Boy-Who-Lived... so how can you possibly use love to defeat me when no one loves you?"

"No Harry! Don't listen to it!" Hermione pleaded.

But Harry didn't seem to hear her. Instead, he saw the face of Hermione inside the locket, mocking him, screaming at him. "How could I love you? You chose the redhead over me. Me, who waited for you. Me, who helped you. I love Ron, not you. Never you!" Tears



were forming in Harry's eyes, watching the face of his girlfriend telling him she didn't love him and could never. His arms were trembling, barely holding up the sword that was above his head.

Hermione, sensing his weakness, jumped in to help. "No, Harry, listen to me!" She cupped his face with her hands, and turned his head to look into his eyes. What she saw frightened her. His wonderful, bright green eyes were now dimmer, his pupils now red like Riddle's. Finding a powerful inner strength, she let out her deepest feelings.

"Harry, I love you... I love you..."

Harry blinked.

He blinked again.

And the red in his eyes suddenly waned, and the spark of life that was once a fixture returned. He blinked again, seeming to regain his composure. He looked deep into Hermione's chocolate brown eyes, and saw the look that he had seen earlier by the fire, the look he didn't know how to describe. It was love. She loved him. She loved him. And he could see it so readily in her eyes.

Without hesitating a moment more, he plunged the sword into the dark object, piercing the windows inside it. The dark Hermione inside it let out a terrible scream, forcing everyone to cover their ears. Soon, the locket cracked and hissed, and quickly died. The three friends stared at the now defunct Horcrux, amazed that it was finally destroyed.

Harry tossed the sword aside; his shoulders slumping in relief, a small smile curling on his lips. Hermione lunged at Harry, throwing her arms around his neck, pulling him in tight. She had tears running down her cheeks, her face buried in his shoulder. His arms wrapped around her, holding her, trying to comfort her.

Ron stared bewildered at the affection being shown by the two people standing before him. His jaw was slacked, mouth ajar, eyes wide. He shook his head, snapping himself out of whatever daze he was in. He walked tentatively over to his two friends, and put his arms around

the two of them. They in turn opened themselves, Harry putting his left arm around him, Hermione her right. And the three stood there, embracing for the first time as a trio in over a month.

They finally broke apart, standing in a small circle, looking at each other. Hermione spoke first. "Don't think this lets you off the hook Ron," she said calmly, still sniffing from the tears she had been shedding.

Ron nodded, acknowledging the accuracy of her statement. After what felt like an eternity, he opened his mouth, his eyes suddenly very interested in his shoes. "I'm sorry. I'm really, really sorry. I know you can't immediately forgive me, but I hope you can in time. I want to help. I was a prat. Huge prat. I'm sorry."

Harry and Hermione looked at each other, their eyes flickering in silent communication. Soon, Harry turned his attention back to the redhead. "Ron, I think we will be able to forgive you, but there's something you need to know," Harry said, now looking directly into Ron's eyes. He reached out with his right hand hesitantly as Hermione reached out with her left hand, and without looking, found each other's hand and intertwined their fingers. Ron watched this simple gesture, and his eyes went wide, and his mouth fell open in shock.

"I want to know something before we forgive you Ron," Harry said timidly. "Do you want me to be happy?" Ron nodded slightly, his eyes never leaving the linked hands of his best friends. "Do you want Hermione to be happy?" Again, Ron nodded.

"Then please," Harry began softly, trying to explain his feelings to his best friend. "Just, try to understand. Ron, Hermione is the most important person in my life. Everyone I've loved has died. My parents, Sirius, Dumbledore. What about you? Have you lost anyone? You have your Mum, your Dad, Bill and Charlie, the twins and Ginny. I have Hermione. I love Hermione. She loves me apparently too," he paused, "I had you."

Harry and Ron were looking each other square in the eye. Harry saw the hurt and the pain within them. But there was just as much

suffering in his own, which were now welling up with tears. "Please, don't leave us again, because of this," he said, holding up his hand that was attached to Hermione's. "We need you. I need you. I love you. You're my brother. Please don't let a girl we both fancy come between us," Harry said pleadingly.

Ron, still in shock at his two best friends holding hands, chanced a look at the girl he had quite a fondness for. "Hermione?" he said weakly.

Hermione looked at Ron, a steely resolve in her eyes. With a crackling voice however, she began. "I'm sorry Ron. I tried. We tried. You broke my heart, you cut me deeper than I could have imagined. Harry loves me, and I love him. I still want to be your friend, best friends if we can, but I can't and don't want to change what's happened between me and Harry."

Ron looked back and forth between the two of them. He took several deep breaths, trying to calm himself. Again, he found the floor of the tent very interesting. "Hermione, you deserve to be happy. So do you Harry. I know I hurt you when I left Hermione. I only hoped that I could find you again, and that we could be together," he said, finally looking up.

After another deep breath, he continued. "But, I have to deal with the consequences of my actions. I lost my chance with you. I can accept that. And I can accept you've chosen Harry over me. I certainly haven't given you any reason not to." Ron shrugged his shoulders, slowly accepting his best friends being a couple. Finally, a small smile crept on his face. "Just do me a favor?" he asked, pointing a finger at both of them. "Don't go snogging in front of me for awhile?" he said teasingly.

Harry and Hermione grinned from ear to ear. "I think we can manage that Ron." Harry replied.

Ron was smiling, but suddenly looked at Harry with a puzzled look. "What about Ginny? She thinks your hers you know." Harry simply shrugged his shoulders, indicating he'd cross that bridge when he

came to it. "Ok, just make sure I'm not around when you tell her. I don't want to be on the wrong end of that hex of hers."

The trio embraced one more time. Harry and Hermione traded their forgiveness for Ron's acceptance. They walked outside and sat down next to the fire. Harry and Hermione cuddled together under the blue blanket once more, as Ron sat across from them. For the next couple hours, they talked about what each other had missed. All was well again.

A/N: First, hope this one lives up to the previous chapter. I want to explain a couple things I've done here.

1) Harry's not wearing the locket as mentioned in the story. I think H/Hr would discuss it and decide it was for the better. So, when Harry chases the doe, he's not under its influence. He'd think more rationally, rather than breaking the ice and just diving in. Then when Ron shows up, Harry would dive in and get the sword, therefore Ron wouldn't have to break the Horcrux.

2) Hermione's reaction to Ron is harsher here, why? I believe that after spending a month with Harry, she'd realize she's more compatible with Harry. When Ron gives her that little smile, she snaps, letting out all that hurt that he caused her. In the book, I think she held back because she still had feelings for him. But here, she's got Harry. No need to hold back with the guy who broke her heart.

3) No big argument between the trio. I mean, how could I do that after what happens between Harry and the Horcrux? Then, Harry basically guilt trips Ron into accepting the relationship. That, and I do like Ron. It seemed fitting with everything that happened that they wouldn't argue about it, they would instead talk it out.

Thanks for reading! Hope you enjoy it. This isn't the last chapter. I've got ten planned, so hang on to your hats!

## Chapter 3: Volcanoes

“I’ve had enough trouble for a lifetime.”

The dark-haired boy stood there, blankly staring at the wands that had ended it all. Hungry, bleary-eyed and sleep deprived, his thoughts were incoherent. His legs were weak, barely able to keep him upright. His body was wobbling from exhaustion. His eyelids becoming heavy, wishing desperately to shut out the morning light that was cascading through the window in the Headmaster’s office. ‘Or is it Headmistress now?’ the boy thought.

Slowly, he turned towards the two people standing behind him, though his eyes didn’t focus on them. He placed the three wands, Draco’s, the Elder, and the holly and phoenix feather, in his back pocket. Gradually putting one heavy foot in front of the other, he made his way toward the doorway that would lead him to his salvation: sleep.

Gently, one of his companions slipped a hand into his, and guided him out the door. Together they walked hand-in-hand down the spiral staircase, taking one step at a time, knowing that there was no rush. As they reached the bottom, his walking companion gave a slight tug, imploring him to stop. Gazing down at the floor, he did as he was silently asked. He blinked slowly, willing himself to stay conscious, his body fighting him all the way.

He vaguely heard his companion speak, it sounded like a she, and like she was miles away from him. “Ron, I’m taking him up to the tower. You go be with your family. I’ll take care of him,” he heard her say. He then heard the faint echo of footsteps leading away from him. Feeling his hand being tugged again, he simply followed. ‘Step. Step. Step. Step. Step.’ It was a struggle, using his legs and feet as they were supposed to be.

As they reached a certain point, his eyes saw something not quite right. The floor in front of him wasn’t flat anymore. He blinked. His head tilted up. ‘Stairs. Bloody stairs.’ He crept up the Grand Staircase, wincing with every step up, his body aching for the sweet relief that

awaited him on the seventh floor. 'Up. Ugh. Up. Ow. Up. Ugh. Up. Bloody hell. Up. Ugh.'

Eventually the pair reached their destination, standing in front of a portrait. He heard his female companion whisper something to the portrait, what it was he couldn't make out even if he tried. Once again, he felt his hand tugged, and once more he followed. His unfocused eyes finally found something that his body had been asking for: a nice big comfy couch. His companion, however, kept leading him toward some as yet unknown destination. But his body overruled this decision, and he collapsed onto the sofa, his hand ripping out of his companions. He sunk into the couch, his head resting comfortably, slowly sagging to the left. His eyes were drooping, giving in to his body's desire.

"Oh no sleepy head, not here. The bed will be much more comfortable and private. Come on," he heard her say. His hands were grabbed, and he felt his arms jerk forward, but his body stayed in place.

His eyes drooped shut, eyebrows furrowing. "Noooo...." he moaned. Suddenly, his arms dropped to his side, and the cushion to his left sagged. A warm, soft body snuggled up next to him. His left wrist lifted, and his limp and rough fingers were interlaced with a set of light, warm ones. Soft lips were placed on his cheek, a small but delicate kiss. The lips made their way to his ear, and a shiver ran down his spine from the warm breath.

"I love you, Harry Potter, and I always will. Now rest, you've had a long day," she whispered. She kissed his cheek once more, and laid her head against his shoulder. Without another thought, his head rested on hers, his eyes finally shut for good. He vaguely felt something cover him, perhaps a blanket. He didn't really care. His body relaxed fully, allowing him to drift off into a world where his aching body was of no concern.

Harry felt heavy. His eyelids did. His arms did. His legs did. His head did. Everything felt so heavy.

He inhaled. And he smiled. His spirits lifted. A very familiar aroma filled his lungs. It was, undoubtedly, the best smell that he could possibly wake up to. 'Vanilla. I'll never get tired of that scent. Not in a million years.' Slowly, he peeled open his eyes, which were greeted with the sight of brown, tangled hair. His heart swelled, trying to explode in his chest. He squeezed his left hand, which was still interlinked with her hand, trying to gauge her alertness.

No response.

Harry chuckled, seeing his wonderful girlfriend completely out of it. He looked around the room, trying to guess exactly how long they had been sleeping. He careened his neck around toward the window, and saw that it was dark outside. 'Huh, must have been out for a while.' Thoughts whirled around in his brain, remembering the encounter in the Room of Requirement.

He saw the twins coming out of the portal behind painting, much as the trio had done moments before. Then behind them came Ginny. Their eyes met. She flashed her beautiful smile at him. He tried to smile back, but he was sure what appeared on his face was not a smile, but a look of being ill. He didn't want her to come. He broke up with her to keep her safe. But now she was at Hogwarts, that fiery look in her eye, ready to fight along side him.

When he spoke up about needing to find the diadem, Cho Chang offered to take him to Ravenclaw's tower. But Ginny roared in disapproval, wanting Luna to take him instead. Harry's insides turned over, feeling as if Ginny was trying to mark him as her territory, that no other girl should speak to him or interact with him without her permission. Ron's voice rang loudly in his ears, 'She thinks your hers you know.' He felt like a piece of meat, something to be owned, not loved.

Before he left with Luna, Hermione grabbed Harry's attention. She squeezed his hand, and looked him in the eye. Instantly, he knew what she was saying. They had always seemed to be able to read each other's expressions, but now that they were a couple, he could read her like a book. With the simple squeezing of his hand, and the

look in her eye, he heard her loud and clear. 'Don't worry about her. I love you.' He smiled, and went with blond Ravenclaw.

Harry was brought out of his thoughts by the shifting body beside him. His eyes were unfocused, looking toward the roaring fireplace. He felt light kisses caressing the left side of his neck, and his eyes closed involuntarily. A small moan left the back of his throat as his head leaned itself into Hermione's soft lips, which completely erased all thoughts of his encounter with Ginny in the Room of Requirement. His head turned, and his nose bumped into Hermione's, causing the two of them to giggle.

"Hey you, sleep well?" Harry asked, a smile creeping across his face for the first time in days. He brought his right hand out from beneath the blanket, and began to caress Hermione's cheek with his thumb.

"I slept ok, my neck's a little sore, but my teddy bear always helps me sleep," she responded, mimicking Harry by bringing a hand up to cup his cheek. After a few more seconds of grazing into each other's eyes, Harry's stomach growled. "Well then, I guess someone here is hungry," Hermione said chuckling. "Wanna go down to the Great Hall and grab something to eat?"

Harry sat there, pondering whether he really did want to leave the sanctuary that he was currently in. He didn't want to go back and be hounded by the throngs of well-wishers again. And in fact, sitting here with Hermione, finally able to look at her with no dark and cloudy future, was all he wanted to do. Another growl from his stomach however, was a reminder that he did need to eat. Thankfully for the two of them, an epiphany hit Harry. His eyebrows shot upward and a wicked grin came with the light bulb over his head.

Harry sat up straight, and called out, "Kreacher!" And with a 'pop', the once despised house elf appeared before them. The servant of the noble House of Black bowed before the couple, the locket they had given him drooped onto the floor.

"How may I serve Master Potter and his Muggle-born lady?"



"Kreacher, thanks for coming. I'd like to thank you for leading the house elves against Voldemort, Master Regulus would be very proud I'm sure, and so am I," Harry said.

"Master Potter is too kind to poor Kreacher. Can I bring Master anything to eat? Master and his Muggle-born lady look famished."

Harry looked at Hermione, silently asking what she wanted. She shrugged her shoulders in an I-don't-care way. Harry turned back to the house elf. "Yes, that would be wonderful. But please, call me Harry. Just some sandwiches and some pumpkin juice please."

"Anything for Master P... Harry," and with another 'pop', Kreacher was gone. Harry sunk back into the couch, his muscles still sore from the battle. The couple sat in silence cuddling for the few minutes that it took for Kreacher to bring them their food, which they consumed quite quickly. Its amazing how much food one can eat when they haven't had a proper meal in nearly a year.

"Harry? I'm still tired, can we go up to your room, so we can sleep on an actual bed?" Hermione asked timidly, not knowing how Harry would react to having her ask to sleep in his bed. He looked at her with a smile on his face, and nodded. They got off the couch, and ascended the steps of the boy's dormitories, walking up hand-in-hand. They found Harry's old bed, and slipped under the covers. Harry snaked his arms around Hermione's waist and pulled her close so that her back was flush against his chest.

After a few minutes of laying in silence, Harry had something he needed to say, something that had been bothering him since it happened. "Hermione, I'm sorry."

Puzzled, Hermione's eyebrows shot up in confusion. "Sorry for what Harry? That you rid the world of an evil person who took pleasure in killing? That's nothing to be sorry for," she said with understanding and calmness.

Harry shook his head. "No, not that. I'm glad about that. I knew it was him or me. And I'm very happy it was him," he said, squeezing her for emphasis. "I'm sorry for what I did to you, to everyone. I left; I went

alone into the forest, without saying anything to you. Then everyone saw me in Hagrid's arms, with Riddle proclaiming me dead. I heard you scream. It was the worst I've ever felt in my life," he said, tears streaming down his cheeks, matching the now flowing rivers of his girlfriend.

"I wanted to cry out that I wasn't dead, but I couldn't. I wanted to comfort you, and tell you I was ok, and I was hoping that you wouldn't do anything to get yourself killed thinking I was already gone. I'm so sorry Hermione. I'm so sorry you had to go through that, thinking I was dead."

Hermione rolled over so she could look at his face. They were both crying, knowing how lucky they both were to be there, alive and healthy, holding each other. She brought her hands up to his face, and cupped his cheeks. She kissed him hard, and he returned it feverishly. When they broke the kiss, she spoke.

"Harry James Potter, I accept your apology. But don't you ever do that to me again. I love you too much. When I thought you were dead, I felt dead inside. I didn't care about living anymore. When me, Luna and Ginny were fighting Bellatrix, I didn't care about dying. I just wanted to kill her, and then Voldemort. I wanted them to suffer like I was suffering. Then Mrs. Weasley came and threw us out of the way and killed her. I turned to face Voldemort, and saw him cast off McGonagall, Flitwick and Kingsley. I wanted to go after him, but then I heard you. I heard you cast that 'Protego' to protect Mrs. Weasley, and..."

She stopped for a moment, her breath caught in her throat. After several deep breaths, she went on. "I can't even begin to describe what I felt. Mostly overwhelming relief. You were alive. My world literally stopped when I saw you come out from under your cloak. I was so happy. I knew you were ok, and I knew you were going to win. I just knew it."

Harry chuckled through the tears, a small smile cracking his tired face. "I nearly had a heart attack when I saw that Killing Curse buzz by Ginny. I couldn't handle losing any of the three of you. You three girls mean so much to me, I veered off from going after Voldemort to go

over to you three. And you know the rest of course," he said, happiness and a tinge of concern in his voice.

Hermione chuckled, "So, the three of us? Is there one girl in particular you wanted to save?"

Harry laughed at the bushy-haired witch. "Well, I don't know. I haven't dated Luna, so it's not really a fair comparison of the three of you, is it?"

"Technically, she's the only one of us who's had a proper date with you. She was your date to Slughorn's party last year, remember? Ginny and I haven't had a chance to go on an actual date with you," she replied smirking. Harry laughed again, and nodded.

"True, true. But if I remember correctly, she's the only one I haven't had a snog yet with."

"Well, that's your fault then isn't it? I'm sure Luna would have loved to have taken you into a broom closet that night had you shown the slightest interest. However, if everything goes how I want it too, neither of them will get another chance at my teddy bear," she said, and proceeded to kiss him once more, which turned into wonderful little snogging session. Eventually, the happy couple drifted off to sleep once more, and a large weight had fallen off Harry's shoulders.

"So, are you ready to face them?" Hermione asked, knowing full well what the answer was. She knew Harry too well. The harmonious couple had woken up early the next morning, happy as can be. Waking up in each other's arms was something they had grown accustomed to over the past several months. After showering, they were in the Common Room, getting ready to go down to breakfast. "You'll have too eventually."

Harry walked over to his girlfriend, wrapping his arms around her waist. As usual, she put her arms around his neck, a move the two had perfected over the course of their relationship. It was almost instinctual at this point to move into this particular position.

“Well, the sooner we do this, the sooner we can leave for Australia to find your parents. I’m really looking forward to that, getting away for a while from all this attention. It’ll be a nice vacation, plus you’ll get to introduce me to your parents all over again, this time as your handsome, wonderful boyfriend,” he said smiling. Hermione returned his smile, and stood up on her toes, and kissed him hard - their tongues twirling together, her fingers flowing through Harry’s always-untamed hair.

Finally, Harry broke the kiss, his lips still tingling from the wonderful snog, as he heard someone enter the Common Room. He broke their loving gaze, and turned his head towards the portal. There he saw the youngest Weasley, his ex-girlfriend. He tried holding back the smile that was still plastered to his face, but was failing miserably. What stunned him however, was the incredulous look on Ginny’s face. ‘Did she just see us snogging?’ From the looks of it, she did.

“H-Harry? H-Hermione? W-What...” Ginny sputtered out, her eyes looking on in seeming disbelief. “But... Harry...” She covered her wide-open mouth with her hands, her eyes trying to jump out of their sockets, tears slowly coming to the forefront; she was the living, breathing definition of thunderstruck. “Are you two? You know?”

Harry turned to face the redhead, swinging Hermione slightly with him. He took his right hand off of Hermione’s hip and brought it up to his forehead. His eyes closed tightly, his hand furiously rubbing his forehead. Eventually it made its way up to his hairline, where he proceeded to run it threw his uncontrollable locks, messing it up even worse than Hermione had. Scratching his scalp nervously, he opened his eyes to look at Ginny, and gave her a simple nod.

And the switch was flipped.

Gone was the somber, sad Ginny Weasley, Harry Potter’s best mate’s little sister. In her place was the vengeful, scorned ex-girlfriend of the Boy-Who-Lived. The tears in her eyes suddenly receded. Her eyes narrowed, eyebrows sinking into the center of her forehead. Her arms suddenly shot down to her sides, her hands clinched into fists.

“WHAT! How could you do this to me Harry! I loved you! I waited for you! Do you know how many guys were after me this year? Especially after we started the resistance? They saw me as brave and strong! But I told them no! I was waiting for my hero to come back to me!” Ginny shouted at the top of her lungs.

Thankfully no one was in the Gryffindor tower except the three of them. And if the tower weren't soundproof, the entire castle would be privy to the “private” conversation. With Ginny screaming at him, Harry's temper raised itself to her level. He wished with all his might that it wouldn't come to this, but unfortunately it had. Harry let go of Hermione, afraid to do anything while he was still holding her. He turned to face his ex, taking the same posture she did. But once he started yelling back, his arms began to fling wildly, speaking loudly with his body language as well as his voice.

“Your hero? Your HERO!” he shouted. Hermione winced behind him, knowing that Harry despised that title. She knew better than anyone how much he hated it. Wisely, she hung back behind him, letting him continue with his rant. “What am I to you? Some prize to be won? Some Quidditch trophy to be hung on the wall and admired? Some hunk of meat who's famous for surviving the Killing Curse?” Harry's emerald eyes were blazing with fury. He hadn't felt this angry since hearing Hermione's screams of pain at Malfoy Manor.

Ginny took a couple steps backward, not expecting this type of reaction out of Harry. She clearly expected him to cower and let her have the upper hand. But she dug her claws in, determined to let out her frustrations on him. “You're my boyfriend, that's what! Did you really think I believed you when you broke up with me! I knew you were just being a noble prat! I didn't think you actually took that seriously! And besides, you promised you would come back to me! What was it you said? 'I don't think there'll be many dating opportunities where I'm going'?” Ginny then gestured towards Hermione, and said, “Then what the bloody hell do you call this!”

Harry completely lost it at that point. He had always been protective of Hermione, but now, in his current state, he was absolutely livid. He gritted his teeth, his fists clenched tightly, and growled at Ginny. “It's called discovering love, Ginny. It's called opening my eyes to a

wonderful, beautiful woman who loves me for me. Not an infatuation with some fan girl who fawns over the bloody Boy-Who-Lived! All you wanted to do was snog and ask me about my oh-so wonderful adventures. You don't even know me Ginny! The real me!"

Harry was breathing heavily, anger pulsing through his veins. Both he and Ginny glared at each other, their eyes locked onto each others. Harry guessed that there was a lot more going on here in this argument than just their relationship. It was a release, letting off the pressure that had been building up inside them from over the course of the year. Neither of them had vented it off apparently, and were now discharging all of it at one time.

Perhaps if Harry took a moment, he could appreciate the fact that both he and Ginny were able to dish out and take each other's best shots. The fiery redhead had always had a temper, just ask her brothers. The Boy-Who-Lived also had a reputation for a short fuse, as evidenced back in the summer before his fifth year, when no one could communicate with him. He exploded at his two best friends when he arrived at Grimmauld Place. Now, Volcano Potter was erupting, as was Mount Ginny, and neither was backing down.

The emotions in play were obvious. This argument wasn't just about the two of them. It was about pain, grief, and loss. Harry, going through the emotional rollercoaster that was the hunt for Horcruxes, sacrificing himself in the Forbidden Forest, then only to come back from the dead to defeat Voldemort.

Ginny was going through difficult times herself the past year. Being a co-leader for the DA, nearly stealing Gryffindor's sword, the torture sessions with the Carrows, and now losing her brother Fred.

No, this was no normal argument. This was a release. And all involved knew it.

"Of course I know you!" Ginny screamed back.

"Do you now? Fine, lets play a little game. Let's call it The-Boy-Who-Lived quiz. I'll make it easy. If you can't answer it, Hermione gets a chance. Sound fair?" Harry said, crossing his arms. Ginny looked

simply appalled, but straightened up, and nodded at Harry. "What's my favorite dessert?"

Ginny looked confidently at Harry, and said, "Anything chocolate." Harry cracked a smile, and shook his head. He turned to Hermione, and nodded at her. She looked uneasy, not wanting to be involved in this, but she knew that Harry needed her right now. Her head was down, left arm dangling at her side as her right hand was rubbing her left arm nervously. She knew the answer, like always.

"Treacle tart," Hermione replied quietly. Harry smiled brightly, and nodded in affirmation. Ginny looked furious once more.

"That's not fair! She knows you better than anyone! I know a lot about you! But how am I supposed to compete with Hermione bloody Granger? She's the only one you talk too!"

Harry nodded gently at Ginny. He brought his voice down, no longer mad or angry. He had achieved his goal. "You're right Ginny. Absolutely right." Ginny looked ready to explode again, but when the actual words hit her, she stopped. She blinked repeatedly, processing what he really said. When she seemed to regain her composure, Harry continued.

"That's why I want to be with her. She makes me feel normal, like I can talk to her. I can share things with her because she understands me. She's been through what I've been through. She's been at my side, no matter what I've tried to do. She doesn't see me as some famous hero. She sees me as a moody, sulky, stubborn, insufferable git, and you know what? She loves me for it."

Hermione walked up beside Harry and put her arms around his waist. She was trying not to smile, but she couldn't help it. He put his left arm around her shoulders, pride swelling in his chest. Finally, he continued.

"I'm sorry Ginny. I do want you to know I enjoyed being with you for the short time we were together. But, I was a different person then. Everything I've gone through this year has made me realize that

there's only one person who I want to be with. I love Hermione, and I hope in time, you can accept that."

Ginny was again shocked at the outpouring of emotion showed by her former boyfriend. Harry looked down at Hermione as she looked up at him. Ginny saw the sparkle in their eyes when they looked at each other. Her jaw clenched, a shudder went through her body. She never saw that look for Harry, ever. Though she wasn't in Hermione's position, she hoped that perhaps on day, she would be in his arms again.

The young redhead took a deep breath, trying to hide the pain she felt inside, and stepped towards the couple. "Harry, I'm sorry. I wanted to make you happy; I wanted to be the one who gave you that look in your eyes that you just gave to Hermione." Ginny turned her attention to the woman that replaced her. "Hermione, make him happy. He deserves it," she said, trying to give a smile to her at one time best female friend.

Hermione had tears forming in her eyes, and broke apart from Harry. She walked over the closest thing she had to a sister, and pulled her into a tight hug. Ginny reluctantly put her arms around her, but soon hugged back. "You know Ginny, you're the sister I never had. I'm sorry I hurt you. But I love Harry. I know you do too, but I don't think I could go back to living without him." The two girls broke apart, and Harry came up and gave Ginny a hug as well.

After the hug, Harry and Hermione embraced again. Ginny looked at the couple, and smiled, wishing it was her. "We're all leaving to go back to the Burrow in a little while, you both are welcome to come," she said, her voice still creaking with emotion.

"Thanks for the offer, but me and Hermione are going to go and get her parents. I still have to go talk to Kingsley about arranging a portkey to Australia, and we've got a couple other things to do, but thank you for the offer. We need to spend some time alone as a couple, without the sense of impending doom around every corner," Harry said while cracking a smile.



“Ok, well, good luck with that. I should go. We have...” Ginny said, sighing, “Things to take care of.” She walked over and gave a final hug to the two of them. “Bye you guys. Have a good trip if I don’t see you before you leave.” And with that, Ginny walked out of the Common Room.

Harry sighed heavily as he watched his ex walk out. He looked down at the love of his life, and smiled again. “Well, that went well,” he said sarcastically.

Hermione chuckled, and kissed him on the cheek. “It could have been a lot worse. She could have hexed you you know. And it doesn’t appear that she hates either of us, so that’s something, right?”

Harry nodded. “You are, like always.” He leaned over and gave her a peck on the lips. “Ok, let’s get this over with. I need a vacation.” And with that, Harry and Hermione walked out of Gryffindor Tower, arm-in-arm, preparing to enter into the one thing Harry dreaded most: glory and attention.

A/N: Ok, Chapter 3 in the books. Hope it went well and you enjoyed it. I had a hard time trying to figure out exactly how Ginny would react. This seemed to fit. Need a little conflict to spice up the story. I really like Ginny, but her character is vague enough in the books to allow for this type of behavior I think.

And yes, I fully realize that when Ginny quotes Harry from back at the Burrow, it's not verbatim. I don't think anyone could directly quote something like that in the heat of the moment, instead just give a vague idea. Ok, if you have any questions, feel free to ask.

## Chapter 4: Interview with the Vampires

'Why me?' Fame. Glory. Admiration. It isn't often when an individual shuns these things. Most people seek them out. They want them. Need them. And in a sick, twisted, perverted way, when one does try and shun the spotlight, it only serves to fuel the fire more. 'I only did what needed to be done. I didn't do it because I wanted all this. I just want to live my life peacefully. That's all I've ever wanted.'

"Mr. Potter! Mr. Potter!" the throng shouted. The wizarding media was amassed in the Great Hall. Grown men and women shouting, raising their arms high in the air like a sea 11-year-old Hermione Granger's. Flashbulbs were popping and quills scribbling furiously. It was unlike anyone had ever seen. There wasn't this much media around during the time of Grindelwald. Now, there were over 100 writers and photographers from around the world to cover this one event: The Boy-Who-Conquered speaks.

Harry Potter didn't want to do this. He was dragged into it, kicking and screaming. Fame was not his motivation. He had it. Fame happens when you survive the unsurvivable. Glory came with the territory of being Harry Potter. He didn't seek it. It sought him. Admiration? No other wizard alive was more admired than Harry Potter. He was on the short list of 'Most Admired Wizard of All-Time'. Merlin, Dumbledore, Potter. That's it. That's the list. Yet he was bashful, shy, and modest. The only people he wanted this kind of attention from was his girlfriend, his teachers, and the Weasleys.

"Settle down! Settle down!" yelled out the temporary Minister of Magic Kingsley Shacklebolt. He stood out of his chair, and put his hands up, trying to quiet the horde of reporters. Soon, the noise was down to a slight murmur. "We are not here to badger Harry and his friends. We are here to listen to their story. If they do not wish to answer a question, that is their prerogative. Only the few reporters in the front may ask questions. If you do have questions, please make sure they are relevant questions." The minister turned his head to his right, nodded at Harry, and sat down.

There were five people seated in front of the press. Headmistress Minerva McGonagall, Hermione Granger, Harry Potter, Ronald

Weasley, and the Minister. Harry was leaning forward in his chair; his right hand was holding the left hand of Hermione, their fingers intertwined. He was looking down at the floor, not wanting to make eye contact with the throng. He felt his upper arm being rubbed by Hermione, and his best friend Ron gently patted his back. He took a deep breath, and began.

“Everyone here thinks of me as a hero. Many people think I want to be a hero. I don’t. I’ve only done what I needed to do. And I couldn’t do it without the people seated next to me, my best friends: Hermione Granger and Ron Weasley. They were my strength, my reason to keep going. The Weasley’s are my family. Without their love, I wouldn’t be here. Albus Dumbledore: the greatest, the most powerful, and the kindest wizard I’ve ever known. He was like a grandfather to me.

“There are so many people that helped me along the way that are no longer alive. My godfather Sirius Black, Remus Lupin, Nymphadora Tonks, Alastor Moody, and countless others. My mum and my dad, for without their sacrifice I wouldn’t have made it that night all those years ago.

“I didn’t do any of this because I wanted all of the attention. I did it because I wanted me, my friends, and everyone else to live normal, happy lives. It’s all I’ve ever wanted.”

Harry finally looked up with tears in his eyes. He saw the reporters in the front row, and sitting dead center was the one he despised above all others. Unfortunately, she would be the asking far too many questions for his liking.

“Harry dear, if I may ask, where were you all year? You were at Albus Dumbledore’s funeral, and you seemingly disappeared into thin air,” Rita Skeeter asked.

Harry was glad he insisted that Hermione and Ron be there with him. Not only did he want them to receive the recognition that they deserved, but to be there to support him in moments like this. His loathing for the reporter sitting in front of him had not dissipated over the past year. He despised the book she had written about the former

Headmaster. Now she sat in front of him, smirking, trying to get a rise out of him. He breathed deeply, trying to calm his quickly rising anger, and answered as calmly as he could.

“Good to see you Ms. Skeeter,” he said, his statement dripping in sarcasm. His hand that was holding Hermione’s tightened, and she responded in kind, giving him the support to go on. “We, and by we, I mean Hermione, Ron and myself, went searching for Dark Artifacts related to Voldemort. They needed to be neutralized in order for him to be defeated,” he said flatly.

“What types of objects were they?” another reporter asked two seats to the left of Rita.

Harry rolled his eyes in annoyance. ‘Did I not just completely avoid saying exactly what they were? Bloody hell, aren’t these so-called reporters supposed to go to school or something?’ Harry gritted his teeth and shook his head before he replied.

“Can’t tell you. I don’t want anyone else to get the idea. I’ll say this, it was horrible, and no one should have to go through what we went through. That’s all I’ll say about them.”

“Why can’t you Harry dear? If You-Know-Who can do it, why not someone else? Shouldn’t it be common knowledge so future witches and wizards can easily defend against them?” Rita piped up.

“No. Next question,” Harry said tersely. A murmuring wave swept through the Great Hall with his answer. Obviously, they were surprised how close to the vest the young man sitting in front of them was keeping this secret. ‘Why can’t they just drop it?’

“Well, what can you tell us about these so-called ‘Dark Artifacts’?” a reporter, apparently from Asia judging by the accent, asked. Harry closed his eyes forcefully, the blood beginning to boil in his veins, and his teeth clinched tightly. Hermione leaned over and whispered in his ear, saying that she would try and deal with the nosy reporters.

“Perhaps I can explain a little better than Harry here. These objects were horrible, despicable, and should never be dealt with again. They

are the most evil, vile things I've ever had to learn about, and had the displeasure of dealing with. They are responsible for the death of many people, including Albus Dumbledore."

The collective 'gasp' that washed through the hall was astounding. Even Headmistress McGonagall and Minister Kingsley joined the shocked onlookers and reporters. The only people not shaken by that announcement were the two boys to Hermione's left.

Harry had already gone into detail with his two closest friends about the memories of Severus Snape. At first, both of them were appalled that Harry would actually side with the former Potions Master. But Harry was able to persuade them into watching Snape's memories, which was clearly enough for the both of them to agree with Harry.

Hermione took watching the memories the hardest however. When the conversation between Snape and Dumbledore about Harry needing to die was viewed, she started crying. By the end of it, she had thrown her arms around Harry's neck, burying her head into the crook of his shoulder, bawling her eyes out. She was clinging to him as if he were going to drop dead at that moment.

"That's why you didn't say good-bye!" she wailed into his shoulder as her tears flowed freely. "I wouldn't let you go, but you had to! I'm sorry Harry! I'm so sorry! I shouldn't have said those things last night! I just thought that you were being a noble prat! You had to die Harry! Oh Harry! I can't imagine what this was like for you!"

Harry did his best to comfort his weeping girlfriend. He constantly rubbed her back, and tried running his hands through her bushy hair. Finally, when he started to knead her scalp, did she slowly begin to calm down. He didn't say anything, all he did was "Shh" her, trying to relieve the stress of her overwhelming emotions.

Ron however had a different reaction. Being the ever clever chess champion of the group, he understood. He knew what Harry had done. He may not have agreed with the method, nor understood how, but he knew why. Ron had always been able to see the game of chess in the grand scheme. Harry had shown that he had not only the metal fortitude to go through with it, but with the complete

understanding that sometimes, you have to sacrifice the Queen to win the game.

As the shock wave from Hermione's bombshell subsided, the reaction was almost intimidate. Nearly every reporter jumped to their feet. Overwhelmingly, they shouted the same three things in various forms: How do you know? What about Severus Snape? And how did it happen?

The smirk on Harry's face could be seen from across the room. He knew exactly what Hermione had done, and chuckled to himself for not thinking of it on his own. 'That clever little witch. I should have thought of that myself. But, she isn't the smartest witch of her generation for nothing! Can't get them to drop a topic? Give them something shiny to oogle at. That's so great. "Oooh, look! Shiny object!" Ha!'

Harry looked over the stunned reporters, still inwardly laughing as Hermione had completely shifted their focus with just two words: Albus Dumbledore. He lifted his left arm, his hand open, palm facing the crowd, trying to get their attention. Which quite frankly, didn't take long. He was Harry Potter, every word he spoke was like gold to them.

"Severus Snape, was a man I despised with a passion for all my time at Hogwarts. He treated me as a verbal punching bag. He purposely destroyed my work. He went out of his way to favor Slytherin. He hated my father, and because I look like him, he hated me by proxy. Yet when Voldemort returned, he willingly walked into the dragon's cave and fed us inside information about him and his inner circle. He did it everyday starting at the end of my fourth year, when Voldemort came back. Severus Snape put his life on the line everyday. And I'm sure you're wondering why?"

Harry paused.

For a full ten seconds.

There wasn't a person not on the edge of their seat.

Doubly so for Headmistress McGonagall. She had helped to shoo the now deceased Headmaster out of the school. She had done everything to try and undermine his authority. She would never punish students unless it was a blatant and violent act, or in front of Snape and the Carrows. Though there was one thing that she had always wondered about. Snape never punished those closest to the trio as hard. Now it was perfectly clear. He was truly on their side. So much so, that he had to be the bad guy. Always. That was the only way to fool Voldemort. Anything less would have led to his death.

“Because Severus Snape loved my mother.” Harry said, as calmly and coolly as possible. Another collective 'gasp' came from everyone who was not the trio. This time however, hushed silence came after. Harry waited for everyone to regain their wits, and continued. “They grew up together. They were very close friends, not unlike myself and Hermione. My mother and Snape had a falling out, and their friendship never recovered. He turned to the Death Eaters. She turned to my father.”

Harry paused for a moment, inwardly asking himself if he wanted to give full disclosure to everyone. He certainly didn't want to talk about the prophecy, nor Snape's role in how his parents died. The only way to repair Snape's reputation was to try and convince them that he was truly on their side. Which when witnessing his memories, he was. And revealing that he had a hand in the deaths of James and Lily Potter, would only serve to confuse everyone more.

“When Voldemort targeted my family, Snape pleaded with him to spare my mother.” Harry paused briefly, letting out a long breath. “After my parents died, he came to Dumbledore and became a spy. His help and information led to countless lives being saved, including my own. He should be recognized as a hero, a key component to winning this war.” A wave of chatter spilled through the hall, and the scratching of quills taking down quotes. Harry didn't want to continue with the current topic, so he waited for a question.

“Mr. Potter, when did you begin this quest for these Dark Artifacts?” asked a middle-aged and gray-haired man in the second row.

“We began last summer. We were all at the wedding of Bill Weasley and Fleur Delacour. The Ministry fell to Voldemort, Kingsley sent word to us of an attack that was coming. We left immediately afterward. Had it not been for Hermione's planning, and having everything we needed in her pouch, there's a good chance we wouldn't have survived.

“That's when the three of us started. Professor Dumbledore began before we did. I really have no idea how long he was working on it. He brought me into it at the beginning of my sixth year.”

After a slight pause, Hermione jumped in. “Harry had private lessons with the professor throughout that year. Ron and I didn't know at first what they were. Harry convinced Dumbledore to let us in on it, knowing it was bothering Harry not to tell us. That was about a month into the school year.” Hermione squeezed Harry's hand, as the two teens looked at each other and smiled.

Another reporter, this time a female, stood up and asked, “Mr. Potter, Ms. Granger, Mr Weasley, what was the worst thing you encountered on your adventure?”

The temperature immediately dropped in the room. An uneasy feeling came over everyone there. Harry, Hermione and Ron simply looked at each other. Nothing needed to be said. The nauseous feeling in the pit of their stomachs said enough. 'What was worst? What kind of question is that?' All three shuttered at the same time. Harry wanted nothing more than to ignore the question, but Hermione had different thoughts.

Hermione knew that Harry had to talk about the things he had been through. She knew it wouldn't be good for him to keep all that hurt, anger, and pain bottled up inside, especially considering she wanted her Harry to relax on their vacation to Australia.

“We experienced things that no one should have to. Not just one, not two, but many.” Hermione took a deep breath, and bit her lower lip before continuing. “The worst for me, was seeing Harry carried out of the Forbidden Forest just a few days ago. I think I speak for a lot of people in this room in saying I was heartbroken.” Nodding heads



throughout the room accompanied her statement, including the woman to her right, Headmistress McGonagall.

"It was without a doubt, that worst thing ever to happen in my life," Hermione continued, a small trickle of tears escaping her eyes. "I saw the man I love, dead. Nothing can be worse than that. I can't tell you how happy I was to see him alive just a few minutes later." Harry reached out with a conjured handkerchief and dabbed her tears away. Finally, Hermione threw her arms around Harry's neck, and pulled him into a tight hug. The sound of snapping camera shutters filled the Hall as the two embraced, a perfect 'photo-op' to accompany their stories.

As they finally separated, the Headmistress spoke up. "I believe Ms. Granger, that everyone who was there felt the same way. Harry is an extremely unique young man that I've had the pleasure of having in my house for his time at Hogwarts. Seeing Harry in the arms of Hagrid," Minerva said as she began to dab her own tears. "I've never had children, but that was as close as I've ever felt to losing a child."

Harry was leaning forward, his head turned towards his Head of House. When she finished, he got up from his chair, and much like with Hermione, gave a big hug to the Headmistress. Everyone who knew Minerva McGonagall couldn't believe their eyes. No one had ever seen her show this much emotion, let alone hug a student. But as was his norm, Harry made people do things they normally wouldn't do.

The Headmistress finally let Harry go, but as he started to back away, she reached up and cupped his face with her hands, forcing him to look at her face. Her usual stern look was gone, her eyes weren't steely nor focused. They were full of joy and happiness. She was smiling widely. Well, for Minerva McGonagall it was a wide smile. Harry couldn't help but return it. She patted his left cheek with her hand and let him go, and he returned to his seat.

Harry looked out over the crowd once more, and reminded himself of the question that was asked. He was disappointed that Hermione had answered it instead of ignoring it. Now he felt obligated to also give an answer.

His thoughts wandered to all the horrible things he had encountered during the past year. Pain, near-death, and tragedy were prominent throughout his memories. In Godric's Hollow, both he and Hermione had nearly died. If it wasn't for her quick thinking and actions, he most certainly would have died. Looking back, he couldn't believe how foolish he had been. He had been led by a complete stranger into a dark room without Hermione. It was not the last of his mistakes.

Another mistake of his led to their capture and imprisonment at Malfoy Manor. He had forgotten about the Taboo on the word Voldemort. Within moments of uttering the name of his greatest adversary, the trio was surrounded. They were transported to the Malfoy estate, and locked in the basement with Ollivander and Luna Lovegood.

When Hermione was brought out of the basement for questioning, Harry begged them to take him. He remembered the evil look on Bellatrix's face as she dragged Hermione away from him. Harry was torn a part seeing her taken from his side. The worst was yet to come however. Hearing the love of his life scream in agony from the torture was ten times worse than experiencing it himself. He banged and banged on the door, trying to burst through the heavy wooden door with his fists. He screamed her name at the top of his lungs, desperate to save her.

Only when he searched his pockets did he find help in the form of the small piece of broken glass. Within the mirror, he saw a flash of blue. He called out for help, saying that they were at Malfoy Manor. Moments later, Dobby appeared. Harry had never been so happy to see his little house elf friend.

Harry had his face buried in his hands, reliving the terrifying moments. Hermione knew what he was thinking of, so she tried the best she could to help him. Much like Harry had done all those months ago in the tent to comfort her, she started massaging his back and shoulders, doing her best to relieve his stress. After a few moments, the effect was evident in Harry's body language, as his tense muscles finally started to relax. He then started to tell his story.

“Without a doubt, the worst for me was being forced to listen while Hermione was under the Cruciatus Curse. I had to hear her scream. I couldn't do anything. I felt so helpless. I never want to go through that ever again.”

A quiet hush came over the crowd. They were clamoring for the rest of the story. Harry had stopped suddenly, his emotions clearly getting the better of him. Hermione wrapped her arms around him, again trying to comfort her boyfriend. Fortunately for the reporters, Ron decided to take up the story from there, knowing exactly what Harry was talking about.

“We were at Malfoy Manor when that happened. Bellatrix Lestange was the one who has torturing Hermione. We were captured by a group of Death Eaters after Harry uttered the Taboo word. We managed to escape with the help of a house-elf named Dobby, who was quite fond of Harry. Unfortunately, in our escape of Malfoy Manor, Dobby was killed. Harry buried him in a proper grave, because that little house-elf did so much for us. Another victim of this war.”

When Ron finally finished, the silence in the Hall was deafening. Everyone who was there happened to be thinking the same thing: Just how close did we come to not winning this war? It was painfully obvious that Harry and his friends had endured many hardships in the past year, all because they were trying to rid the world of an evil unseen in generations.

A younger looking witch in the second row stood up. She looked around the room, and decided to ask her question. “Mr. Potter, Ms. Granger, if I may ask, in an attempt to lighten the mood a little here, just how long have the two of you been a couple? Officially?”

There was a small chuckle that went through the throng. This seemed to be the perfect question. The tension was effectively broken, and it appeared that Harry and Hermione were more than happy to answer.

“We've been officially together since before Christmas. Best decision I've ever made,” Harry said, looking at his long-time best friend, now girlfriend. “And no, I don't know the exact date, not because I'm not a

good boyfriend, we just didn't have a calendar in the tent with us. I know it was about two to three weeks before Christmas."

"December 9th or 10th, I do believe." Ron spoke up. Both Harry and Hermione looked over at the redhead, puzzled. Both of them really weren't sure of the exact date when they decided to get together. But Ron did know when he left, and after talking with the two of them, figured they got together three days after he left, which put them on the 9th or the 10th. However, as a group, they all decided never to acknowledge that Ron left them for a month. It was just better that way they decided.

The happy couple simply nodded in agreement with Ron."Yes, that sounds right, doesn't it Harry?" Hermione interjected. Harry put his arm around Hermione, and nodded. They both smiled, and gave a give peck on the lips, which resulted in having nearly every female in the Hall 'Aw' at the two teenagers.

"Well Harry, I guess this means you won't be on Witch Weekly's 'Most Eligible Wizard's' now?" Rita Skeeter interjected. "I'm also glad to see I was right during the Triwizard Tournament, wasn't I?"

Harry looked at Rita with an amused expression on his face. "Ms. Skeeter, first off, you were wrong back then. Hermione and I were not a couple in our fourth year. Merely best friends, as we are now. But as you can tell, we are together, and we're quite happy about that. Turns out you were just a couple years too early. As for Witch Weekly, I could care less. I have the one woman I could ever possibly want right here with me. No other could come close. I'm happy, and I hope everyone else will understand that."

"Are there any wedding bells planned in the near future?" asked the Witch Weekly reporter.

Ron decided that this was a good time to throw in his two knuts. "If you ask me, they're already an old married couple. They've always acted like they are, even before they got together. Its the way they look at each other, and know what the other is thinking. It drives me barking mad when they do. They'll just cock an eyebrow at each

other, and boom, they have a whole ten minutes conversation in that one look. Its scary sometimes. So to me, they're already married."

Laughter washed through the Great Hall. Both Harry and Hermione were glaring at their best friend, who could only chuckle at the looks he was getting from the two of them. He knew they weren't really mad at him, but were instead happy that their redheaded friend saw how close the two of them were.

Harry then leaned over and looked at Minister Shacklebolt, and nodded again. With that simple gesture, the Minister rose to his feet.

"It appears that Mr. Potter has reached his limit on answering questions today, and with what we've all heard and seen today, I would hope that everyone here will respect these fine young people and give them some privacy. Thank you all for coming today." As one, the throng of reporters leaped to their feet, yelling and screaming out last second questions, trying to get one more answer from the now famous Trio. But with an easy wave, the five of them walked out of the Great Hall, and away from the reporters.

Harry and Hermione walked out holding hands, with Harry next to the Minister. He leaned over and whispered in Kingsley's ear. "I need to talk to you. Meet in the Headmistress' office in few minutes?" Kingsley agreed. The Trio walked back to the Gryffindor common room as the Minister and the Headmistress walked to her office.

Once they reached the common room, Harry and Hermione fell onto the couch together, with Hermione laying on Harry with his arms wrapped tightly around her. Ron sat on one of the comfy seats close to the couple. There they sat in total silence, except for the crackling sound coming from the fire. Ron sat still, while Harry ran his hands through Hermione's hair. It was one of the few things that really relaxed him.

Finally, Harry broke the silence. "Ron, just to let you know, Hermione and I are going to Australia to find her parents. I don't know how long we'll be gone, but we plan on making it a vacation. Hope you don't mind that you're not going, but we feel we need to spend time as a couple while we're there."

"No, I don't mind. I understand. I think I need some time to myself come to think of it. Plus with what happened to Fred..."

"I know Ron, I know. Just remember, we're always here for you mate."

After a brief pause, Harry looked at his male best friend, the young man he considered a brother, the one he had met all those years ago on the train. His first friend. "Always," he reiterated. Ron smiled and nodded at his famous best friend.

Harry nudged Hermione, prodding her to get up. Reluctantly, she did. Once she was off of him, he got to his feet as well. Hand in hand, they walked together to the Headmistress' office, where Kinglsey and Minerva were waiting for them.

Halfway there, Harry spoke up. "Mione? You ready to go get your parents?"

"Absolutely. I hope they're alright. Plus, I get to introduce them to my new boyfriend," she replied, a large smile on her face. She couldn't wait to introduce Harry to her parents. Sure, they had met him before, but this time would be different. Harry would be the first, and with a little luck, last, boyfriend she would introduce to them. She was radiating happiness, which Harry could feel.

"Don't worry, we'll find them. I just hope your father doesn't kill me. I think I'd rather face Voldemort again than face your dad."

"Oh come on, he's not that bad."

"You say that because you're his little sweet princess. I'm the guy whose trying to steal his daughter away from him and corrupting her innocence. Big difference."

"He's already met you though."

"I don't think meeting him as a 12-year-old and now is at all similar. I'm the boyfriend now, not just a friend."

“Well, I know mum will like you. And she knows how to deal with my dad. She likes you already. I've told her all about you, so I think she's been waiting for me to introduce you as my boyfriend for a couple years now.”

Harry couldn't help but cling to the idea that Hermione's mother would protect him. She sounded like he was already accepted by her, so all he had to do was not screw it up. After dealing with all the things he had in his life, not screwing up seemed rather simple.

As they reached the Headmistress' office, they knew what was in store for them once they entered. It was officially the beginning of their life together. No more Voldemort, no more prophecies, not more fighting for their lives on a daily basis. Just Harry and Hermione against the world. And maybe with some help from Ron too.

Harry looked at his beautiful girlfriend, and had one overriding thought at the moment, 'Australia, and vacation, here we come!'

A/N P.S.: Vacation time for Harry and Hermione in beautiful Australia! Whoo! I've been looking forward to the next chapter. Until next time!

## Chapter 5: Paradise Found

The smell of salty sea air permeates every pore. Warm breezes move merrily along, lightly kissing every exposed surface, bringing with it small grains of sand. Wind chimes rattle, playing the seemingly random notes of some unknown melody. Bright sunshine beaming down, shimmering off the glass-like surface of the ocean, the blazing yellow and orange disk gracefully falling towards the edge of the Earth.

Is this paradise? Is this utopia? Or is it something else? Some small slice of heaven? Some picture-book definition of tranquility? If one were to look around, few words or thoughts would truly come to mind. All of them failing to accurately describe the scene before them.

Beautiful? Hardly. Much too mundane of a word. Beautiful describes people, places, things. The word is thrown about like disposable napkins. No, this place is not beautiful. Sure, it has beauty. But beautiful doesn't describe it with the proper tone, nor does it come close to encompassing the feeling.

Awesome? Yes. But the word is overused. What was once awesome: The Roman Coliseum, The Great Wall of China, The Statue of Liberty, is diminished, now depicting the everyday, the ordinary: a surfboard, a movie, a t-shirt. No; awesome has lost its edge, its true meaning.

Try to find one word, failure is certain. Try many words, failure is probable. No word invented nor phrase coined would do justice to this scene, this place. It must be lived, experienced, absorbed into one's soul.

Harry and Hermione were having the time of their lives. They had been in Perth, Australia, for three weeks. The weather had been perfect. Most of the days had been sunny and warm. The two teenagers had never experienced this kind of summer. Sure it was June and Hermione had spent some time abroad, but in the Southern Hemisphere, it was wintertime. But yet the weather was as good or better than the summers in Britain.



Harry had never been to the beach in his life. He had been living each day on this vacation as if it were his last. He took in the sights, sounds, and smells, committing as much as he could to memory. This experience he wanted to remember in detail, so that he could recall them at a moments notice.

Day after day, the young couple walked on the beach hand-in-hand, explored all the touristy areas, and relaxed in general. This was the first time since they had known each other that there was no great need, no great task, no overbearing weight hanging on them. They could just be themselves, be a normal, in love couple.

The time the two had spent together on their vacation had brought them closer together. They were amazed just how harmonious they were without having to worry about Death Eaters or a Dark Lord around every corner. They talked, laughed, and enjoyed each others company immensely.

With no set time-table as to when they would go back, the two of them settled into a routine while inhabiting their vacation home. After waking up and untangling themselves from each other, Harry would start to cook breakfast, usually eggs, bacon and sausage. Hermione would prepare the table, make toast and coffee, and would assist Harry in whatever way she could. They had decided that Harry was the expert in the kitchen between the two of them. After all the time he spent cooking for the Dursley's and spending multiple summers at the Burrow watching Molly Weasley, Harry was quite adapt around the kitchen.

In the afternoon, they would walk on the beach, swim in the ocean, stretch out on the beach and tan, or explore a new area of Perth. Harry particularly enjoyed all of the water sports available. He tried talking Hermione into surfing, but she steadfastly refused. So while he learned to surf, she went for the safer alternative: body boarding. They also enjoyed snorkeling and scuba diving. They were also planning on taking the opportunity to visit the Great Barrier Reef once they found Hermione's parents.

Because he was the Boy-Who-Lived, The Chosen One, the Boy-Who-Conquered, Harry was able to procure this wonderful house on

the beach. Harry didn't ask for it, he was simply given it by the Minister of Magic Kingsley Shacklebolt. Being the person he is, Harry tried to refuse, but the Minister was quite emphatic on the issue.

The beach-front house was amazing: A four bedroom, three bathroom house with a jacuzzi and a large back porch capable of hosting a medium-sized barbecue party. The porch was enclosed, and depending on the occasion, the privacy fence could be high enough to make sure no one could observe the happenings on the porch, or low enough to provide spectacular views of the sunset.

Ice rattled against the sides of its glass cage, swishing around in its liquid companion. Side-to-side and all around, the ice is at the beck and call of its sick, demented tormentor. But if these particular ice cubes had feelings, or eyes, or brains, they would feel honored. They would realize that they were in the company of heroes, of champions, of victors over evil. But alas, ice has none of those things; no heart, nor soul. It only serves its purpose: to keep its friend, its faithful liquid companion cold.

The raven-haired young man swirled the last of his iced tea, gazing down into his glass, chiding himself for once again for adding too many ice cubes. It always watered down his drink. 'Never enough sugar, always too much ice. I'll get it right one of these days.' Lifting the orange, flowery decorated glass to his parched lips, he hastily drained it of its liquid. The ice sought its revenge for its unjust incarceration, racing down the side of its enclosure, gravity now its only friend, streaking towards its only means of escape.

'Oh bloody hell!' The young man jerked his head forward, and instinctively threw his body backward. Trying to avoid the icy, sticky mess which had launched itself towards his face, was his only thought. He quickly tipped up his glass up, narrowly avoiding the disaster. As it were, cold, watered-down trickles of iced tea managed its way out of the glass and onto his face, dribbling down his now wet chin.

Without the aid of a shirt, which he had taken off long before walking out onto the porch, he did the only thing a hot-blooded male would do, and that of course is wipe the offending liquid off with his bare arm.

After the nearly catastrophic event that took place, the young man with glorious emerald eyes resumed his comfortable position by leaning against the fence separating the porch from the beach. The old, weather beaten wooden fence was gray from all the water damage it had suffered throughout the years. It retained its structure, and was quite adapt as a leaning post. The boy leaned heavily on said fence, his left elbow resting comfortably, the glass that was once full of iced tea now resting in his right hand, its weight fully supported by the old wooden fence. He looked out over the beach, his eyes wandering, absorbing in sights he had never seen until this wonderful trip.

Lost in splendor of the scenery before him, the hero of the wizarding world was vaguely aware of the strikingly beautiful woman who joined him, wrapping her slender arms around his waist. Without a conscious thought, he lifted his arm off the fence, and wrapped it around the shoulders of the bushy-haired girl now beside him. She rested her head into the crook of shoulder, and let of a heavy sigh. It wasn't the kind of sigh she had weeks prior. That sigh was one of hurt, pain, and sadness. No, this sigh, this was of happiness, joy, and contentment.

After a few minutes, she turned her head to look up at the boy holding her. He made her happy. He made her feel special. He always said the sweetest things to her. He would tell her how beautiful she is, how smart and intelligent she is, how clever and fun she is. Though in her own mind, she was nothing of the sort.

She was plain, ordinary, "vanilla" as they say. She couldn't be beautiful, not with her boring brown hair, which was always a tangled mess, untamable by any normal means. But for some reason, his hands always found their way into it, daring to venture into the jungle of chocolate curls. It was absolute heaven when he would massage her scalp. She definitely had to agree with the adage "seekers have the best hands".

Her smile was nice, but nothing more. But he would tickle her, tease her, or say almost anything just to see her radiant grin. In reality, all he had to do was smile at her, because if he did, she was sure to

follow. That was one of the great things about the two of them: If one was smiling, it wouldn't take long for one to mirror the other.

She never thought that her body was something boys would notice. On their long walks on the beach, she would wear her modest two-piece bathing suit, and she would see all the other girls in their racy looking bikinis. She couldn't blame her boyfriend if his eyes wandered around, examining the tan, toned bodies of the other girls. Even her own eyes would drift off, and her mind would race, comparing herself to these beauties on the beach. But to her great surprise, he said he only had eyes for her. He even sheepishly said once the only reason his eyes weren't glued to her body was for two reasons: 1) He didn't want to walk into anybody, and 2) He didn't want to make her think he was gawking at her.

Oh how she loved this boy. Handsome, heroic, athletic, a gentleman. Of course she liked all those things about him. Every witch from ages 14 to 49 wanted to have him for all those reasons. But it wasn't those traits that made her love him. It was because he was modest, shy, and self-deprecating. He was always quick to praise others and downplay his own accomplishments. "Luck," he would say, "I'm just lucky." She knew better though. She knew of his intellect, his sense of right and wrong, his loyalty to all those close to him, his fly-by-the-seat-of-his-pants style of planning. Those were the things that attracted Hermione Granger to Harry Potter.

"So, who won, you or the ice?" Hermione asked teasingly, obviously trying to get a rise out of her boyfriend. Harry chuckled at her, turning his head to face her. He shook his head, thinking that his mishap went by unnoticed. Clearly, it hadn't.

"I would call it a draw. The ice is still safely in its glass, I didn't spill any down my chest, so there was no clear victor. A draw," he replied, allowing a small grin to grow across his face. "I can't get anything by you, can I Miss Granger?"

Hermione smiled, and leaned upward and kissed him on the cheek. "Why, Mr. Potter, would you say something like that?" she said while smacking him playfully on the chest with her left hand. "You say that like it's a bad thing."

"Yeah yeah yeah, 'brightest witch of her age' and all the rubbish, right?"

"Hey now, I didn't come up with that."

"Yes, you're right, your naming skills are beyond reproach, Miss Spew."

Hermione gaped at him, her jaw dropped, and smacked him again on the chest, this time with a little more force behind it. After he 'oofed', she retorted. "It's S-P-E-W! Not spew! Honestly Harry! How many times have I..." Harry was now covering his mouth, trying desperately to try and hide his laughter, but he was failing miserably. "Oh you prat! You... ugh!"

"Hermione, come now, who names their organization that horribly?" Harry choked out between fits of laughter. "Spew? I know it's S-P-E-W, seeing as I'm one of the founding members. But couldn't you have come up with something a little better?"

"Oh, and I'm sure you're just overflowing with ideas, huh?" she asked sarcastically.

"How about coming up with an acronym that will actually enhance your organization, not detract from it? You want to do something for the house elves. What about, People for the Rights of House Elves?"

"P-R-H-E? That doesn't even make sense."

"It's better than spew. At least it's so incomprehensible you'd have to spell it out." Harry said, ignoring Hermione and her rolling eyes. "Ok, what about, um... House Elf Liberation League?"

"H-E-L-L? Hell? Great, perfect Harry," Hermione mockingly replied.

"Ok, you're right on that one." Harry paused for a moment, before a light bulb went over his head. "Hermione, I've got it. House Elf Liberty Protectors. H-E-L-P. Help! Or something along those lines. Help would be a perfect acronym for you."

Hermione had a blank expression on her face, and blinked repeatedly for a few seconds. Clearly, this revelation by the man she loved had thrown her for a loop. She opened her mouth several times to try and say something against this new idea, but nothing came out. She was completely speechless.

"That... that is... bloody brilliant," Hermione finally sputtered out. "H-E-L-P. Help. That's fantastic! I can't believe I didn't think of it myself. You're amazing Harry!" She threw her arms around his waist and squeezed him tightly. He put his arms around her, and patted her back. Finally, she let him out her vice grip, and beamed up at him. "We'd have to work on exactly what H-E-L-P stood for, but that's such a wonderful idea."

Harry could only look on in wonder of the love of his life. He could see the gears turning behind her eyes, idea after idea flying around in her mind. This was one of the moments he truly treasured. It was typical Hermione; lost in thought, looking adorable as ever. Her brow furrowed, nose crinkled, lower lip being used as a chew toy, her eyes slightly glazed over. He could never see that look enough. He had seen it hundreds of times in his life. But now, since she was his girlfriend, and his destiny was fulfilled, it took on new meaning.

"Well, I do have my moments, though I do seem to get them a lot more regularly with you around," he said, smiling down at her. She still looked deep in thought, apparently not listening to him.

"Hermione?"

Again, no response. But she did bring her right hand up towards her mouth, where she bit onto the tip of her index finger. Whether it was a conscious movement or not he wasn't sure, but it was off the cuteness scale, that much was for sure. 'Her lip must be getting raw,' he thought to himself as he chuckled.

"Hermione, aliens have landed on the beach and they've asked me if the two of us would like to continue our vacation on Mars, and I said yes. Is that ok?"

After a couple beats, her head snapped up and she finally appeared to come out of her thoughts. “Ya, sure... whatever... wait... what did you say?”

Harry couldn't contain his laughter this time. His hand was covering his mouth in a failed attempt at disguising his reaction to the funniest thing she'd said in the past few days. To hear Hermione Granger, bookworm extraordinaire, perhaps the smartest witch or wizard to be born in the past 50 years, stammering and stuttering was truly a memory to cherish. Her eyes were wide, and a rather confused expression firmly planted on her face, which was priceless to see.

“I said,” Harry paused for a moment. There was an internal struggle, a battle ranging inside him. Should he actually repeat the alien comment, or go on to what he wanted to talk about? ‘Hmm, decisions, decisions,’ he thought mischievously. He decided it was best to keep the alien comment to himself. Why risk losing a potential late-night snogging session and instead sleep for a night on the couch? ‘Nah, not worth it. It was pretty funny though. I’ll have to tell Ron about it.’

“I said,” Harry finally continued, “are you ready to see your parents tomorrow?” Harry wondered if he was ready to face the music. He knew it was a big step in their relationship, and the first impression would go along way to determining whether or not the Granger's would accept him and like him.

Her response, while honest, took Harry by surprise. “I don't know Harry,” she replied, her eyes suddenly looking down, a sadness emerging in her voice. “They looked so happy yesterday. Did you see them on the beach? They looked like newlyweds again, having fun and not having a care in the world. What will they think when I remove the memory charm? Will they hate me? Would they rather not remember me? What if they don't want to go back to England? What if they don't like you? What...”

Harry's head was spinning. Her words were coming at him like a rampaging hippogriff. His ears were going into sensory overload. His auditory system was coming close to shutting down on its own. He needed to do something, fast. He obviously needed to cut her off, but it would be almost impossible to stop her with the momentum she had

attained. He saw only one solution that would work, so he put his hastily made plan into action.

He leaned over and kissed her.

Not hard, not passionately, just enough to occupy her lips and stop her words from flowing out of her mouth. And it wasn't a long kiss either: two, maybe three seconds. Just enough to try and throw her for a loop and get her to slow down so that he might be able to get a word in. However, he only succeeded in changing her topic.

"Harry!" she said, her annoyance clear in her tone. With her anger rising, she continued. "What was that for? I was talking about my parents and you just lean over and kiss me? I was in the middle of speaking and trying to answer your question but how am I am supposed to do that when you kiss me? What are you smirking at? I don't interrupt you with a kiss while you're talking, do I? No, I don't think so! So where do you get off doing it to me? Would you stop smirking! I'm trying to have a serious conversation with you and you can't stop kissing me or smirking at me. Believe it or not, snogging doesn't solve every problem. Why can't..."

Harry was chuckling again, and yes, he was smirking. He didn't think he was that obvious with it, but apparently he was. She certainly hadn't slowed down. In fact, he had only accomplished getting her attention off her parents and instead she was raining down her wrath upon him. Once again, he tried to stop her momentum.

So he kissed her, again.

This time, he pulled her tight against him, and crushed his lips against hers. She tried pulling away initially, but he used his superior strength to hold her there. He tried his best to not hurt her while she was struggling, but he decided that getting through to her was more important at the moment. After a few seconds, she finally gave up trying to get away, and instead let him finish the kiss, which he did... eventually. He let her go, and she seemed to go right back into her rant.



“Harry! What is with you?” she said fiercely. To his amazement, she stopped talking. She was so riled up, she actually wanted him to answer her question, which he was glad to do.

“Hermione, calm down, take a deep breath, relax.”

“I will not calm down until you answer me!” she responded angrily while stomping her foot on the porch.

Harry shook his head, hoping he wouldn't have to spend the night on the couch, but he needed to unwind her. “Hermione, I understand that you're nervous about your parents, but you need to calm down. They love you, and I'm sure they'll understand once we explain why. You only wanted to protect them. You knew that there was a good chance that they would be targets. They might be upset at first, but they'll forgive you because they love you. And I'll be with you and I'll be there to support you every single second. You're not alone in this. I'm right here, with you. And I'll always be.”

Hermione looked into the eyes of the boy in front of her. Her grief and her worry over her parents had quickly shifted into anger towards her boyfriend. She was mad that he had interrupted her. He had kissed her, trying to get her to stop talking. It was quite rude. But for some reason, it made perfect sense, in a 'Harry' sort of way. She had been ranting, hardly stopping to breathe. Perhaps it was the only way to get her attention. During their time at Hogwarts, he'd always had to wait until she stopped talking to get a word in. Now, all he had to do was kiss her.

As quickly as her anguish over her parents turned to anger towards Harry, her emotions flipped once again. Here she was, one moment scolding him for trying to interfere with her rant, and now her insides were a puddle of goo. He seemed to have a knack for saying just the right thing at the right time. His words, his little rant, brought her back down to Earth.

She had been upset, her fears simmering just under the surface. She was afraid that her parents would hate her for what she did. She was afraid that her father wouldn't like Harry. All those fears and more were there. And yet, with a few simple words, Harry had helped her

with her deal with them. He would be there for her, standing by her side, holding her hand if need be.

“Harry, I'm sorry,” she sobbed, throwing herself into his arms. He reacted by squeezing her tightly against his chest, thankful his words had gotten through to her. “I'm so scared. I don't know what to do. I want everything to work out, but I don't know if it will. I want them to be ok. I want them to be happy. I want them to like you. I'm just afraid something will go wrong and they'll hate me.”

Hermione continued to cry in Harry's arms. He rubbed her back, trying to comfort her, but he knew she didn't need physical reassurance. She needed emotional reassurance, she needed to hear more soothing words, which Harry was more than happy to provide.

“Mione, your parents love you. Everything will work out, I promise. We have each other. We love each other. Sure, your parents might be upset at some things, who wouldn't be? But if anyone will forgive you for what you did, it will be your mum and dad. The love a parent has for a child is unparalleled. Look at my parents, look at the Weasley's. Merlin, look at Mrs. Malfoy. Nothing is going to change that. I promise.”

Hermione sniffled as her head was still buried into Harry's shoulder. As she slowly brought her emotions under control, a small smile slowly crept its way onto her face. She realized that he was right. She was overreacting. But no matter what he said, until it was all over, the fears would be there.

“Thank you, for being here. I don't know if I could do this alone,” she said as Harry nuzzled her neck.

“You know that you'll never be alone, I will always be here for you. No matter what.”

Hermione pulled away and looked up at Harry, and their eyes met. With her arms still around his waist, and his arms around her neck, the couple was locked into this position. The intense gaze continued, each losing themselves into the sea of chocolate and emerald. This

was something that happened often between the two of them. They would lovingly stare, getting a glimpse into the other's mind and soul. No words were exchanged, just pure emotion. Thoughts and feelings not easily expressed in words were understood at times like this. Friendship, desire, trust, lust, love. These words try to encompass the feelings, but when they were like this, the true understanding flowed between them; it was wonderful, powerful, nearly overwhelming.

"I love you Harry."

"I love you too, Hermione."

A/N: Ok, five down, five to go. Thank you to everyone who's reviewed. I really appreciate it. A special thanks go out to Seel'vor and old-crow, because they along with chem prof, witowsmp, and mathiasgranger are among my favorite authors here on . Alright, time to go back into my little corner of the world and mash out the rest of my story. Whoo!

## Chapter 6: Meet the Parents, Part 1

The Granderson's were a loving, happily married couple of over 20 years. After meeting at college, they dated for over 2 years, were engaged for another year, and were finally married in the summer of 1977. Because it was the summer of their 20th wedding anniversary, they had decided to take a year or more off from their successful dentistry practice. They researched multiple places to go on vacation, settling on the city of Perth, Australia. The decision to go to Perth was made because of its temperamental climate, its relatively small population for a city, and its location on the west coast so that they could enjoy watching the sunset over the ocean.

It was, for all intent and purposes, the perfect vacation. The house they had rented for their vacation was on the beach, giving them to access the sun, sand, and the ocean 24 hours a day. Their escape from England allowed the couple to step back and reflect on their lives.

While they deeply loved each other, the one thing they thought that was missing from their lives was the presence of children. Early on in their marriage they tried to conceive, but ran into problems. The closest they came was in 1979, when there was a miscarriage. To this day, they remember what they would have named their child. Both of them grew up loving Shakespeare, and both of them agreed which was their favorite play: *The Winter's Tale*. They narrowed the list of potential baby names down to Hermione Jean if it was a girl or Leontes Jameson if it was a boy.

They had given up trying to have a child years ago, but decided to give it one more go while in Australia. They had yet to succeed, but neither Walter nor Rose Granderson really expected to have a baby in their early 40's. They were however enjoying what was equivalent to a second honeymoon.

It was now early June, and the weather was finally starting to cool down. But today was a nice, sunny day, and even in winter, it was warm enough to go to the beach. Walter and Rose were in their usual positions sunbathing, when they saw a young English couple that had been walking past them for the past few weeks in a small argument.

The young couple looked nice enough, and looked like they enjoyed each other's company. They were always walking hand-in-hand and gazing at each other lovingly. But today they seemed to be in disagreement over something. They were trying to keep their little tiff to themselves, but were unable to keep from bursting the noiseless bubble that surrounded the Granderson's, who heard almost every word.

"You said we were going to do it today," the black-haired boy said. He was medium height, a shade under 6 feet tall, and slender.

"No, you said today. I don't recall agreeing," the young lady retorted. The girl had caught both Walter and Rose's attention since the young couple had moved into the place a few houses down from them. They would catch snippets of their conversations, but never heard them mention their names. She looked strikingly like Rose: uncontrollable brown hair, slight build, and long legs. They hadn't been up close enough to tell if they shared the same eye color, but Walter would bet on it, seeing as everything else seemed to fit.

"Oh come on Hermione, it's not going to be that bad."

Both Walter and Rose's heads snapped around to look at the two kids. They really hadn't been paying attention until now. How many people would name their little girl Hermione? And on top of that, she looked like a younger version of Rose.

"Honey, you know how I keep having those weird dreams?" Walter said to his wife.

"The ones I keep pestering you to tell me about but you never do? Those dreams dear?" Rose replied, never looking up from her book which she was currently reading.

"Yes... well... about them. I've been having them for a while now, you know? The reason I haven't told you about them is because... it's... difficult to describe..."

Rose finally set her book down and looked over to her left at her husband. "Walter, you know you can tell me. I'm a grown woman; I

think I can handle listening to your dreams. It can't be any worse than hearing you ramble on about that blasted football team of yours."

"Ok. Well, I keep seeing her," he said, pointing to the young couple. "At least it looks like her, but younger. And the girl in my dreams... her name starts with an H. I never can hear her full name. But she looks like her, like she's our Hermione, but alive. It's so strange. I know that she's not, but... it's just too weird."

Rose Granderson had always been the down-to-Earth, practical person in the relationship with her husband. Books, truth and facts always ruled her world. There was no room for ghosts, spirits, or dead lovers talking through mediums. She knew her partner in life dabbled in that kind of stuff. He didn't necessarily believe it, but left open the possibility for that 'weird stuff' she always referred to it as.

Now here she was, listening intently to him talk about a girl on the beach who happened to look like her, and had the same name that the two of them would have given their daughter. He talked about her like he knew her, or knew something about this girl on the beach. But what freaked Rose out the most, was that she agreed with her husband. The girl did seem familiar. Perhaps it was just the uncanny resemblance, but it felt like more.

"You know Walter, it does feel like I know her, like I should walk over there and talk to her. I've felt like that every time I've seen the two of them. And the fact that her name is Hermione, she looks like me, plus your dreams, it's just too odd. What is going on?"

"I don't know dear, maybe we should talk to them? What could it hurt? They have English accents, plus it sounds like he's trying to convince her to go jump in the ocean, not that I blame her for not wanting to go in. It is wintertime. You want to go talk to them? Maybe it'll help get us over this... thing... we're going through. Maybe once we talk to them, we can move past this entire 'Hermione' thing?"

Rose pondered Walter's musings. It made sense. Perfect sense really. Afraid or unsure of something? Confront it head on, nip it in the bud as they say. It was a simple, direct solution. After a few seconds, she agreed.

"I think that's a great idea. At worst, we get over this little thing we're going through. At best? Maybe they're really nice kids and we have lunch with them. It can't go horribly, can it?"

"Perhaps a tad embarrassing, maybe awkward, but we've dealt with little buggers at work, this can't be any worse. And are you sure you're up for it? I know you haven't been feeling well the past couple days."

"Oh Walter, I'll be fine. It's mostly when I get up in the morning, nothing too bad though. I've got an idea about the kids, just follow my lead, oh wonderful husband of mine."

The married couple got up off their beach towels, and walked hand-in-hand towards the two youngsters. As they got closer, they could hear more of the conversation that had started this entire process.

Hermione was running her hands through her hair, her nerves readily apparent. "Harry, you know me. It's just... ugh... so many things could go wrong," she said, trying to stay calm about everything, but failing miserably. Both she and Harry didn't notice that two other people were approaching them.

"And I'll be right there with you. It'll be ok, really," Harry replied, reaching out his hand, gently grabbing Hermione's hand and squeezing it lovingly.

Walter stopped suddenly, causing Rose to look at him quizzically. He leaned over and whispered in her ear. "Rose, she said his name's Harry. I did hear that correctly, right?" Rose simply nodded. "I recognize that name; Harry, from my dreams. The girl was always going on and on about some kid named Harry. This is just getting way too weird."

"Do you still want to do this?"

"Better to find out than be left wondering, right?" Walter replied. She nodded, and they resumed walking towards Harry and Hermione.

Harry pulled Hermione into a light, comforting embrace. With his arms around her waist, she put her arms around his neck, and leaned her head against his chest. By pure luck, she looked the opposite way from which the Granderson's were approaching.

"Come on Hermione, let's do this. The sooner we do it, the sooner we get it over with," Harry said as he kissed the top of her head.

The Granderson's stopped within a few feet of the young couple, both smiling at Hermione's apparent fear of the ocean. "Well young lady," Rose spoke up, startling both Harry and Hermione, causing them to leap out of each others arms and stare at the intruders to their 'private' conversation. Rose chuckled at the two of them before continuing. "While there are many dangerous things in the ocean, and it is relatively cold this time of year, I think that young man you were holding on to seems quite protective of you. I don't think he'd let anything bite you while you ventured out there."

The looks of utter shock on the young man and woman's faces were quite a sight to see. If their eyes could have jumped out their sockets, they easily would have fallen out and rolled into the ocean. Rose and Walter chuckled at their response, and simply tried to calm the two of them down.

"Forgive us for intruding on your conversation, but we couldn't help but overhear it. And since we've seen you two walking on the beach and you sounded like you're from England, we decided to come over and introduce ourselves. I'm Rose Granderson, and this is my husband, Walter." Both husband and wife stuck out their hands, and were met with the same.

"I'm Hermione, Hermione Granger," the young woman replied, feeling oh so awkward at this moment in time, shaking the Rose's hand.

"And I'm Harry Potter, nice to meet you Mr. and Mrs. Grange... I mean Granderson. A pleasure. I'm guessing that you're also from England then?" Harry asked, knowing full well the answer.

"Indeed we are, Harry. We're here on an extended second honeymoon. It was our 20th anniversary last August, and we've taken



the past year off. Are you two here celebrating anything special?" Walter inquired.

Hermione shook her head. "No, nothing special, just enjoying a well earned vacation. We've been through a lot the past couple years," she said, grabbing Harry's hand and giving it a gentle squeeze. "Listen, me and Harry were planning on barbecuing some steaks and I think it would be great if you'd like to come by our place and perhaps we can get to know each other better? It's just been the two of us and we'd love to have some company for dinner. How 'bout it?"

Walter and Rose looked at each other, and nodded at each other in silent agreement. "It sounds lovely. We haven't had much in the way of company while we've been here either," Rose answered. "How about we come on by at... say... four-ish?"

"Wonderful, we'll have to run to the store to grab some more food, but we'll have everything ready for when you get there. We're staying just over there," Hermione said, pointing to the best-looking house on this particular stretch of the beach. "We'll be on the porch, so you should be able to find us pretty easily. We should get going if we're going to have everything ready by then. It's been great meeting you Mr. and Mrs. Granderson, looking forward to it!" Hermione said excitedly.

"We're looking forward to it as well, we'll be there around four or so. Nice meeting you as well Harry, Hermione. Bye," Rose said with a little wave as the young couple turned around and walked back to their place. Rose and Walter turned and walked back to their sunbathing spot. They laid back down, and resumed their unusual conversation from earlier.

"Well, that was certainly eye opening," Walter said, picking back up his newspaper that he'd been reading earlier. "She looks just like you love, got the same hair, same eyes, its kind of scary now that I think about it. And what about the boy? Kind of a gangly looking fellow, seems nice enough though," he said observantly.

"Now be nice Walter, he's a handsome young man and very polite, and it's quite obvious that they're smitten with each other. He has an odd look to him with that dark hair that looks like he's just rolled out of

bed. And those eyes! My goodness, I think that the word 'piercing' is a bit of an understatement, don't you? When he looked me in the eye while shaking my hand, it was like those green eyes were looking into my soul."

"I know what you mean. He certainly acts older than he looks. Carries himself like a man who's been through a lot in his life. Reminds me a lot of the pictures of my father when he came back from The War. He looked so young, but his eyes told a different story. That's what Harry looks like. He can't be in the military though, he's too young."

"Whatever it is... I'm sure it's not pleasant for him to think about, nor something we should bring up. I can't imagine starting a conversation, 'Hey Harry, ever killed a man?' Kind of tacky if you ask me, especially considering they're inviting us to dinner." Rose replied thoughtfully.

After a few minutes, she began to get up. "Walter, I'm feeling a little queasy, I'm going to go take a nap. Wake me up at quarter after two, that way I'll have time to get ready to go."

"All right, enjoy your nap. I'll be in in a few minutes just in case you need anything."

Harry and Hermione walked quickly back towards their rented house with the big back porch. Both were living, breathing zombies; both were too stunned for words. Every plan, every scenario, every well-rehearsed discussion had just been completely blown out of the water. Nothing could have prepared them for the confrontation that had just occurred less than two minutes ago. It was staggering, preposterous, and absurd.

"Bloody hell," Harry exclaimed as they reached their porch. "What just happened?" Harry walked up the few stairs onto the porch, and found his favorite spot to lean against. His eyes sought out Hermione, who took up the spot next to him on his right, slumping against the fence as well.

Hermione folded her arms across her chest, and stared blankly at the house, not focusing on anything in particular. "I believe I just shook my mum and dad's hand like we're total strangers and then invited

them to dinner at our place,” Hermione retorted breathlessly. “Well, on the bright side, we didn't have to have do the ice breaking, they did it for us.” Hermione shook her head, still trying to absorb into her brain the incident that had just played out. “Wow... I can't believe that that just happened. I'm flabbergasted. You?”

“On the list of things I thought were likely to happen, I'd probably put this in the 'Admitting my undying love for Umbridge' and the 'My girlfriend was going to snog my best mate in the middle of battle' category.”

Hermione turned and looked up at her boyfriend, her face contorted to show the utter confusion going on inside her head. “Hey! I didn't snog him! I kissed him on the cheek! Honestly Harry! Do you really think that I'd do that to you?” Hermione asked disbelievingly, her hands now on her hips, her jaw hanging.

Harry heard the hurt and pain in her voice. He quickly tried to explain what he meant. “Honestly Hermione? No, I know you wouldn't. But if someone didn't know that we were together, it would have looked like you fancied him. I don't want it sound like I was jealous or anything, because I know the truth. But I'll freely admit, it was a rather overt display for something like him figuring out that house elves are sentient beings. And it was pretty bad timing on your part too you know. I mean, in the middle of fighting for our lives?”

“Ok, ok, I get it. It's just that he finally seemed to get what I've been talking about with S-P-E-W all this time... well... now HELP I guess. I suppose it just surprised me, that's all,” she replied, relieved that Harry didn't think that she would have kissed Ron, let alone any guy while involved with him.

Hermione stepped in front of him; softly placing her hands on his chest, looked him in the eye, and continued. “To be honest, I can't imagine kissing Ron now that I'm with you. Sure, for quite a while I dreamed what it would be like to kiss both of you. If you and I didn't get together, would Ron and I have tried to give it a shot?” Hermione shrugged her shoulders. “Maybe. Would we have been happy? I guess... I'm sure we could have made it work. But Ron and I at our best wouldn't be half of what I feel I have with you. Even when we

have our disagreements, we talk it out. We don't scream at each other or insult each other. That's why I love you so much, you understand me better than anyone." When she finished, she reached up and caressed his cheek and kissed him lightly on the lips.

Harry looked down at his lovely girlfriend in disbelief. "Woah, I didn't mean to bring all that on, but I appreciate your honesty nonetheless. I can't say that I disagree with a single word you said. You know that if you cared for Ron more than me, no matter how deeply in love I was with you, I would have gladly stood aside to make you happy. That's the most important thing for me: your happiness," Harry said as he pulled Hermione into a tight embrace.

She snaked her arms around his neck and kissed him passionately. His hands were rubbing up and down her back. Her small, petite hands were running through his untidy hair, messing it up even more so than usual. Eventually, they broke apart due to lack of oxygen. A large smile appeared on Hermione's face as his words replayed themselves in her head.

"Yet another reason why you're the most incredible man in the entire world, Boy-Who-Conquered or not. I'm the luckiest girl on this planet, you know that?" she said lovingly as she lightly rubbed her nose against his; a sweet, intimate Eskimo kiss, before he leaned over and captured her lips with his once more.

After he pulled back from her, just enough so that he could speak, pressing his forehead against hers and gazed happily into her eyes. "As much as I'd love to scoop you up into my arms, carry you inside and have my way with you, we have guests due over in a little while. And last I checked, we don't exactly have the necessary supplies for what he have planned."

Hermione's eyes were filled with both mirth and disappointment as she groaned loudly. "I thought I was the practical, responsible, get-things-done-now person in this relationship? Not the impulsive, put-things-off-for-a-nice-snogging-session one?" she said as she sighed. "At least I know I'm a positive influence on you. I guess you should get going, and I'll start taking care of stuff around here. You do know what we need right?" Harry nodded. "Good, now get your cute arse in

gear mister.” They both smiled, shared a quick kiss, and Harry headed off to the store to grab to extra things needed for their impromptu barbecue with the Grangers/Grandsons.

With steaks devoured, salads savored, and wine relished, the four-person barbecue was winding down. After about three hours, the Granderson's had really taken a liking to the young couple that had invited them to lunch. They felt like old friends when talking with them, despite their differences in age.

Five minutes after seven o'clock, Harry and Hermione looked at each other and nodded. “Walter, Rose, would you please excuse us for just a moment? There's something we want to show you,” Hermione said.

“No problem deary, take your time,” Rose replied.

Both Harry and Hermione got up off of their love seat in the living room and went to their bedroom. Each stored their clothes in separate bedrooms, but they insisted on sharing a bed. Ever since the night they entered into a romantic relationship, they discovered that they both slept more peacefully and were much more rested when they slept in the same bed.

They decided that because of this discovery, their physical intimacy should be rather limited, and they decided to take things rather slow in that department. While they were with Ron, this wasn't much of a problem. But since coming to Perth, it was becoming harder and harder not to let themselves give into that sort of thing.

They walked into their bedroom, and went to their respective sides of the bed, where on each nightstand laid their wands. Both knew what was about to happen. The moment of truth was staring them in the face: hoping, praying, daring them to do so.

Harry looked across the bed at Hermione, and their eyes met. The pain and suffering that had once occupied her pupils had dissipated. A steely resolve showed through, a determination to get this done as quickly and as painlessly as possible.

“Are you ready for this?” Harry asked.

Hermione took a deep breath, and replied, "As I'll ever be."

They walked to the door leading out of the bedroom, and wrapped their arms around each other. It had nothing to do with their relationship, it was simply a hug to show support for each other; that they would be there for each other no matter what happened when they stepped back into the living room. After a quick kiss, they separated, and headed back into the living room.

Harry walked in front of Walter, who was sitting in Harry's recliner, and Hermione stepped in front of Rose, who was sitting on the left side of the couch. Both Harry and Hermione had their wands in their hands, and had fake smiles plastered to their faces.

"Walter, Rose, we'd like to apologize in advance. We're sorry. On three 'Mione... One..."

The Granderson's eyes went wide with shock seeing two sticks in the hands of their hosts. Panic set in, but neither of them moved, frozen in fear.

"Two..."

What scared Rose and Walter the most, however, were the looks on the kids holding them at stick-point. They looked nearly as distressed as they were.

"Three..."

"Petrificus Totalus! Stupify!"

And the world went black.

A/N: Ok, the temptation to stop it right here and leave it as a cliffhanger was too tempting. But, I promise part 2 will be posted in a few days. I won't make you wait for weeks, sitting on edge.

And if you're wondering why I chose the name Granderson, it's a mixed name. Granger and Anderson. The canon name can go down in the lake for all I care.

## Chapter 6: Meet the Parents, Part 2

“Harry! She's waking up!”

Rose Granderson... wait... Grand... Grange... Granger... started to stir. Her head was resting on a pillow, her body was stretched out on the couch and she was lying on her left side. She slowly peeled her eyes open. The first thing she saw was a mass of bushy, brown hair. She tried identifying the voice she had just heard, but was having a hard time placing it. She blinked repeatedly, her eyes trying to focus on the person's face that was in front of her. Finally, it registered in her brain just who she was looking at.

“Hermione!” Rose yelled, lunging at her daughter. Throwing her arms around Hermione's neck, she pulled her into a hug and began squeezing her daughter with as much strength as she could muster. “Oh god sweetie! What happened? It's like I remember, but I don't! I love you Hermione! Where's Walter? Where's Harry?” Rose said as she began to cry.

“Mum! Mum! It's okay, calm down, Harry and I will explain everything, I promise! I love you too! Daddy's okay, Harry's with him. He wasn't woken up yet. I missed you so much!” Hermione said, tears flowing freely now that her mother remembered just who she was.

After a few moments, Harry came into the living room to join the Granger women. “Hermione, your dad is starting to come around, and I don't think that I should be the one he sees first, that is if I want to live to see my next birthday.”

The Granger women disentangled, and Hermione stood up. She walked over to Harry and placed a tender kiss on his cheek, and went into the spare bedroom where her father was. Harry assumed Hermione's position on the floor next to Rose.

“Mrs. Granger, I want to apologize for what happened earlier, and we'll try and explain everything as best we can. I know this isn't exactly the best way for me to meet my girlfriend's parents, but I hope that you'll forgive Hermione and I in time.”



Rose finally sat up on the couch and pulled her legs underneath her. She looked Harry in the eye, and saw what she interpreted as sincerity and remorse. With that, she let out a small grin. "Harry, yes, you two have some explaining to do. But I can see that you didn't want to do whatever it is you did, but that it was necessary.

"As far as the 'you-dating-my-daughter' thing... well... it's not totally unexpected young man. I've listened to so many stories about you that I feel like you should be calling me 'Mum' already. I figured it was just a matter of time before you two realized you had more than friendly feelings for each other. And there will be no more of this Mrs. Granger pish-posh. You were calling me Rose at dinner, and you shall call me Rose from now on. Understand?"

"Yes Mrs. Granger... ma'am... ugh... Rose... sorry..." Harry sputtered out.

Rose could only chuckle at the stuttering young man before her. "It's ok Harry. Now, I should warn you; Walter is a pretty stubborn fellow, so as long as your explanation holds water, I'll be on yours and Hermione's side."

"Thank you, and now I know where Hermione gets her stubbornness from," Harry said as he and Rose shared a laugh at Walter and Hermione's expense. Harry could tell that he was going to get along quite well with Rose. 'It only makes sense. Hermione is so much like her Mum it's scary. I have no doubt that I'll get along with Mrs. Granger, er, Rose. Mr. Granger on the other hand...'

"So tell me Harry, how long have you two been a couple? I've been expecting this for a while now you know. I've heard all about this... what was her name? Cho? Chong? Chang?"

Harry let out a nervous laugh. "That would be two-thirds right, Rose. Her name was Cho Chang. She was a Ravenclaw, a year ahead of us, my first crush, and my first... I guess you could call her a girlfriend. We went on one date, and it was a complete disaster. I was quite naive back then. Trust me, if I could go back and slap myself I would."

“And wasn't there another? I remember Hermione talking about you and a girl named Ginny, and my little girl was fawning over your other friend, Ron right? The one who always made her cry?”

Harry sighed heavily. He knew Ron and Hermione had some legendary spats, but rarely, if ever, had he seen Hermione crying after one. 'She must have cried in her room away from us. I'm a prat. I should have stopped them from fighting so much. I should have seen it. Some best friend I was...'

Rose continued, “I was quite disappointed when she told me she was considering Ron. Every time I heard something about him, it was always something negative. Be it some squabble over homework or the Tri-wizard thing, that Ron character always got on her bad side. Anytime I heard the name Ron I wanted to cringe, because I knew something bad was sure to follow. But when she started on about how she might fancy him, I nearly lost my mind. I didn't say anything, but I wanted to come to that school of yours and lock you and Hermione in a room until I was promised grandchildren. Though I'm happy to say now I won't be forced to do that anymore. Now, would you care to explain to me the entire situation? I get the feeling Hermione wasn't entirely forthcoming.”

“Well Rose, that year was just odd. No one acted normal. It was like some bizarro world for a while. Hermione and I were fighting like Ron and she would usually. We were bickering over ridiculous things; mostly over Draco Malfoy and a stupid potions book. To be honest, I thought Hermione would be happy that I was using a book to do well in Potions. But when I started getting praised for my work in class, she basically called me a cheater. I honestly wanted to share it with both her and Ron, but she never wanted any part of it. And Malfoy isn't something we like discussing, it brings up bad memories for both of us.

“Then there was Ginny. Ginny was acting like Hermione a lot, and by that I mean being my best female friend. She stood up for me against Hermione, and I was appreciative of it. It hurt when Hermione treated me that way, and Ginny was the person I turned to. What's funny is that once I started dating Ginny, Hermione and I got along better. Strange now that I think about it. Then on top of that, I was being

'trained' by Dumbledore, but in the end he could have covered everything in the span of a weekend. Like I said, it was just odd.

“As for me and Ginny, we were together less than a month, and I broke up with her at the end of the term. I had a lot going on in my life, and I didn't think having a girlfriend was the best thing at the time. I convinced myself it was only for her protection, but I think subconsciously I knew it was for the best. As for Ron and Hermione? Well, I don't think they were actually ever 'official'. Mutual attraction and all that. She doesn't really talk about it, and I don't ask. I think its better that way. We're both happy now, and that's what matters. And we've been together since a little before Christmas, so about seven months now.”

Rose listened intently to Harry's explanation. She was quite pleased at his thorough response. He didn't pull any punches, and was upfront on his feelings about the girls before Hermione. It was clear to her who his heart belonged to.

Just then, Hermione and Walter walked into the room. Neither of them looked happy, but Walter wasn't in a rage, nor for that matter did he look angry. Much like Rose when she awoke, he wanted answers. He walked over to the couch and sat down next to his wife. He wrapped his left arm around her protectively.

“I believe you two owe us an explanation,” Walter said sternly.

Hermione brought in two chairs from the dining room, and placed them in front of the couch where her parents were. She sat down in one chair, and Harry sat in the other. They nodded to each other, and with both taking a deep breath, they dove in head first.

“Mum, Dad, I'm the one that owes you the apology. Harry had nothing to do with this. He...”

Harry quickly interrupted her, “Actually, I had everything to do with this. It was because of me she did what she did. If it weren't for her being my best friend, now my girlfriend, you two would not have been in danger.”

“Harry, stop that right now! You're not the only one to blame here! So stop being a noble prat about it!” Hermione snapped back at Harry. “We're best friends, and I've chosen to remain your best friend. A troll in first year brought us together, and I was going to be damned if I was going to lose you.

“I said yes to you when you asked me to be your girlfriend because I wanted to. That entails trust, and I trust you more than anyone outside this room. I chose to stand by your side no matter what. It was that choice that put my parents in danger. In fact, being by your side was the best thing for me. Being a muggle-born witch was not exactly the safest thing to be the past year or so. Being by your side, I was able to help put an end to that evil bugger's reign of terror.”

Rose and Walter simply sat back and watched the, for lack of a better term, argument, going on between their daughter and her boyfriend. While both were slightly disturbed by what they were hearing, the overwhelming feeling that they felt was that both of them cared deeply for each other. Perhaps even loved each other. Though they hadn't said it in their presence, Rose figured as much. And it was obvious that the pair would walk through hellfire and brimstone to be with one another.

“Hermione, you know that I'd never trade these past seven years for anything, even though it hasn't been all sunshine and candy. I care about you more than you could possibly know, but I believe we're getting a little off topic. I'll accept it's not entirely my fault, but it isn't yours either. You did what you did because of me, but you were the one who decided to do what you did, agreed?”

Hermione nodded reservedly before launching back into her explanation. “Alright... Now, Mum, Dad, this might take awhile...” Hermione and Harry went on to explain everything in detail that had gone on since the end of their fifth year: The prophecy, Voldemort, Horcruxes, Dumbledore's death; all the things leading up to now. Then came the hardest part.

“Ok honey, as much as what you've told me disturbs me to no end, what did you do to us and why did you send us to Australia? I'm

certainly not going to complain about the accommodations, but I'd like to know why," Rose asked her daughter.

"Like I said before, Dumbledore told Harry about the Horcruxes. When he died, the task of finding them and destroying them fell onto Harry's shoulders. There was no way I was going to let him do it all by himself. I also knew that what we were going to face would be dangerous, perhaps even deadly. I didn't want you two to be targets, which you would have been simply because you're muggles. But because I'm so close to Harry, you would have been the biggest non-magical target there was."

Hermione had kept her composure through most of their discussion, but now she was succumbing to her emotions. As the tears started to fall, Harry, who had been holding her hand the entire time, pulled her from her chair and brought her into his lap. He wrapped his arms around her as she buried her head into his chest. He gently rocked her like a baby as he rubbed her back, trying to calm her down. After a little while, she was able to turn her head away from Harry and continue.

"I'm sorry, it's just hard," Hermione said as she sniffled and wiped away some tears. "I didn't want you to be targets. I didn't want you worrying about me, and since I wouldn't have been able to contact you, I know you would have. The easiest solution to everything seemed to be to just place a memory charm on you and send you away. I know it was wrong on so many different levels, but I couldn't come up with anything else that would accomplish all the things I wanted."

"I knew that there was a good chance I would die. And if you guys didn't know I existed, you couldn't mourn over me. You couldn't be sad at losing a daughter you didn't remember. A lame excuse I know, but it's how I felt."

The two grown-ups listened intently to their eighteen-year-old daughter. They could see how passionate and how resolute she was about her decision. While they didn't necessarily agree with her decision, they certainly couldn't fault her logic. They, as parents, surely understood the feeling she was going through. They would do almost anything to

protect their daughter. And here she was, trying to make them understand that she had done the same for them.

“Hermione, I think I speak for your father when I say that we understand, and we forgive you. As parents, we always want our children to be safe. You did what you did to keep us safe. Seeing as you're the one that can do magic, you could do more to protect us that we could do to protect you. And Harry, we don't blame you for what happened earlier. You were helping Hermione, as any good boyfriend should,” Rose smiled as she addressed them.

“Looking over the situation, I don't know if I could have come up with anything better in your position, Hermione. You did what you thought was best for your family, and for that I can never be upset. And I certainly can't argue with the result. All four of us are sitting here having this discussion, which means that it turned out ok. That is all that matters now, and I'm happy that I'm able to sit down and discuss this with both of you.”

“Harry,” Walter spoke up for the first time during the discussion, “When Hermione was in primary school, she didn't have any friends. My little girl was full of life and laughter before she started attending school, and over the years, I saw her retreating into a shell. The other kids shunned her because she was smarter than them, so she dove into her books, hardly ever coming out of them. Then she went to Hogwarts, where she met you. You saved a girl you didn't know because it was the right thing to do. Ever since that day, my Hermione started coming out her shell more and more. Today, I haven't seen her once crawl back into it, and I have you to thank for it.

“While the extenuating circumstances weren't great, we certainly don't blame you for this. The bottom line is that you both wanted to be there for each other, and you wanted to keep us safe. You asked us for our forgiveness. As far as I'm concerned, it's forgiven and forgotten.”

After a few seconds, Walter chuckled at his unintended pun. “Well, I guess with you two, we really could forget about, couldn't we?” he joked, and soon everyone joined in on the laughter.

"So, what do you two plan on doing now that the world is no longer in need of a savior?" Rose politely asked.

"Well, I always thought I would end up being an Auror; basically a magical policeman," Harry responded honestly. "I've had to spend all my life surviving evil, I just want to live my life and be happy. As a result, I know that Hermione loves to learn about new places and things, so I was hoping to take her around the world."

Hermione looked at Harry in disbelief. "Oh Harry, do you mean it?"

"Absolutely, I haven't had the opportunity to do anything fun in my life, and I think I'll enjoy it as much as you will, if only because I'll be with you. I think it'd be wonderful for us to go around the world and learn as much as we can about both the muggle world and the magical world. Maybe when we get back home, we can turn the wizarding community on its ear, how about that?" Harry said with a glint in his eye and a mischievous grin on his face.

"That, or becoming a teacher. I really liked running the DA, and you were a magnificent teacher for both me and Ron. With all the stuff we can learn on our trip, I think we can put ourselves in a class of our own, and go back to Hogwarts to spread our knowledge to the next generation in hopes that we never have to face this kind of evil ever again."

Hermione looked at her boyfriend with love in her eyes. He truly knew what she liked, and was willing to make it happen and go with her. "Harry, that sounds brilliant! I'd love too!" She cupped his face with her hands and pulled him into a loving kiss.

With the tension finally broken, the Granger's got up off the couch, pulled Harry and Hermione off the chair, and enveloped them in a massive embrace. The Granger women were shedding tears of joy because of their reunion, and promptly sat down on the couch to have their long overdue 'girl talk'. Walter clapped Harry on the back and led him out to the back porch.

"I believe it's time for a little father-to-daughter's-boyfriend talk Harry."

Harry chuckled nervously. "Actually Walter, I think that's a good idea. I needed to ask you about some things too." Harry walked back into the house and grabbed a couple bottles of pop. When he returned, he handed Walter a bottle, and leaned up against the porch right next to him. The two spent the next hour or so talking about life, love, and daddy's little girl.

A/N: Alright. That's Chapter 6, parts 1 and 2! Lots of plot going on here. The rest of the story is getting set up. Hoorah. Hope you liked it! And a BIG thank you goes out to my new beta, The Oh So Bored One. It's nice to be able to have another pair of eyes reading my story before it hits the web.



## Chapter 7: Golden Letters

July 15th, 1998

Dear Ron,

I'm so sorry that Harry and I haven't written you sooner. I'm sure that you've been worried about us, but to be honest, things couldn't be better! We found my parents rather quickly, considering they were literally five houses down from us. We've really enjoyed out time here. It's been really relaxing, and Harry's taken up surfing. It's a muggle activity where you ride, or 'surf' waves on the ocean, standing up on a board. It's hard to explain unless you've seen it, but Harry enjoys it. You know him, if he's not risking life or limb, it's not as fun as it could be.

I hope things are going well for you since we've been gone. How's George doing? I know he's going through a hard time right now. Are you working at WWW? How's the rest of the family? I'm sure your Mum isn't too happy about me and Harry, but I'm sure she'll get over it. Speaking of that, how's Ginny holding up? I've always considered her the sister I never had. She wasn't very happy with me when she found out about us. I hope she knows that I'm not going to give up on Harry just because she dated him before me for a month. She was glaring at me even at Fred's funeral. I just hope that she gets over it.

Just to let you know, Harry and I won't be returning home anytime soon. We've both decided that there's just too much going on there to really feel comfortable. You know how Harry hates all the attention he gets, and with the entire Boy-Who-Conquered thing, it would drive him insane. So, we're going to travel around the world and just enjoy not having Voldemort hanging over us.

I've never seen Harry this happy. It's like he's catching up on seventeen, nearly eighteen, years of not having fun. He and my Dad get along really well. Too well I think. My Dad took him golfing (don't ask, too hard to explain in a letter) a couple days after I restored their memories, and now it's a pain in the arse to get them to go a bloody day without going to the golf course.

Then there's my Mum. I can't believe how much she's gushing over Harry. It's like SHE'S the one dating him! You know I love Harry to death, but I swear, if my Mum didn't have my Dad, I'd have to beat her off with a stick. Yes, it's that bad. Every five seconds she's saying something about him, our relationship, or grandchildren. GRANDCHILDREN!! I'm eighteen!! We're not even engaged yet! Sometimes, she'll drag Harry off somewhere, and EVERY time he comes back red as a tomato. And he'll never tell me what they discuss. Ugh!

Anyway, I'm sorry we haven't sent you a letter earlier, but we've been a little preoccupied. I hope things are getting better back home. We'll try and stay in touch more. Write back soon,

Love from,

Hermione

P.S. Harry's attached a letter too. Don't know what he's said.

Ron,

How's it going, mate? I'll make this quick, because I'm sure you're already bleary-eyed from reading Hermione's letter. I'm sure she told you of our plans to travel around the world. I'm really looking forward to it. I've never been as happy as I am right now. I hope you understand that I don't mean anything against your family, but I just feel so much better away from everything.

By the way, I don't know how long we're going to be gone, so don't wait for me if you're going to be an Auror. I know we talked about going into training together, but the time I've been away has really given me a different perspective on life. I don't think I want to fight anymore. That, and I think it'll be good for you to be on your own for a while. I'm sure being the best friend of the Boy-Who-Lived wasn't easy. You'll always have my support Ron. Be the best you can be, you can do it, be it Keeper for the Cannons, an Auror, or at WWW. Don't wait for me, ok mate? Make a name for yourself on YOUR terms. Don't let them take you because you're my friend, because I

know that you can earn it on your own merits. Ok, well, Hermione's badgering me to finish, hope to hear from you soon,

Harry

July 27th, 1998

Harry/Hermione,

Hey! It was great hearing from you guys! I'll admit, everyone was starting to worry about you, specially Mum, but now that everyone knows your ok, they say hi! Well, except Ginny. She says 'hey'. She's finally coming around about you guys I think. I just think she needs to realize that Harry isn't going to come to the Burrow riding a white horse and take her away. You'd be proud of me Hermione, I think you'd upgrade me to a mug instead of a teaspoon. I'm getting better at the entire girl thing.

Speaking of which, you will never guess who I ran into a couple weeks ago. Go ahead and guess who. I'll give you a clue. Girl... Ravenclaw... smart... gorgeous... give up? No, not Luna, but Padma Patil! Yeah! The girl I took to the Ball in forth year. Well, I should say 'put up with me'. I never appoligizedapologized said I was sorry to her for being such a lousy git then. So, when I ran into her at Diagon Alley, she was with Parv and Lav (oh by the way, she's okay after Greyback attacked her). They sat down with me at Fortescue's, and we talked. Parv and Lav left to go to Madame Malkin's for something, leaving me with Padma. It was weird at first, but after I said I was sorry to her for the Ball, she opened up. We talked for a while, and I asked her if it would be alright if I could make it up to her by taking her to dinner, and she said yes!

Anyway, we've seen each other a couple times, don't know where it'll go, but so far it's been fun. She's really smart like you Hermione, but she's really funny too. I guess she'd have to be with Parv as her sister. I really wish I didn't treat her so badly at the Ball, because I think we really get along well. Maybe I just needed to grow up before I was ready for her.

It sounds like you guys are having fun. Surfing? Never heard of it. But since you said it was a muggle thing, no wonder. Maybe Dad will know something about it. I am helping at WWW. So is Percy and Ginny. George is slowly coming around. The more he works at WWW, the better he's getting. Angelina is also a big reason for him feeling better.

It sounds like your Mum loves Harry already. I'm not surprised. Everyone who knows him can't help but like him. Bloody prat. Just kidding Harry! Everyone wishes you guys well, and we all hope to see sometime soon, maybe during the holidays. I hope things go well with your world tour, stay in touch!

Ron

P.S. I know I'm a couple days early, but I think by the time you get this it'll be near the 31st, so... Happy Birthday Harry!

August 13th, 1998

Dear Ron,

First off, congratulations and good luck with Padma. We're both hoping it works out for you two. I got to know Padma a little bit in Arithmancy and Ancient Runes. She's really nice, and very pretty. And yes, she does have a good sense of humor. I think if you would have given her a chance in forth year, you two probably would have been together throughout school. I think you two fit well together, personality wise. I definitely prefer Padma to Parvati. So don't bollix it up!

We're also both glad to hear that George is doing better. He was a mess when we left. Please give him our love. It's good to hear that Percy is fitting back in nicely. He seemed genuinely happy to be back in the family.

As for Ginny... I think she's part of the reason we're not coming back to be honest. She needs to get over Harry. She needs to find someone to fall in love with, and not some romanticized fantasy that

she's been holding onto for years. I think with the separation, she'll be able to find a nice guy who will do for her what Harry does for me.

Anyway, I have two really big things to tell you about:

Number one: I'm going to be a big sister!! I can't believe it!! I've ALWAYS wanted to have a little brother or a little sister! I'm so happy! Harry's pretty excited too. My parents just found out a few days ago. My Mum hadn't been feeling all that well since we removed the memory charms. Dad said it started a couple days before that, so it wasn't anything we did. So my Mum went to the doctor, and found out she's having a baby! My parents aren't going to ask what the sex of the baby is, so it'll be a surprise when they come. The expected due date is mid-to-late February. So it looks like, if my little sibling is magical, they'll be a year behind Teddy!

Number two: Harry and I have big news of our own. No, I'm not having a baby... yet anyway. We're engaged! Harry asked me to marry him! Oh Ron, it was so romantic! It was the day we all found out that my Mum was pregnant, and we all went out to dinner to celebrate. Harry and I then went and walked on the beach under the full moon. We were the only two people there. What surprises me is that he didn't seem that nervous about it. We talked a lot, and then he started talking about us and our future. He wrote down an entire speech, so I'll write it down here word for word.

"Hermione, you mean the world to me. I love you more than life itself. I would do anything in my power to make you happy. I've thought a lot about us and our future recently. And today just re-enforced what I've been thinking about.

"That night in the tent, as we were laying together, I thought about what it would be like to kiss you, to marry you, and to have children with you. I never had those thoughts before. They gave me the courage to ask you to be my girlfriend. They gave me the strength to continue on, and to fight harder to make that dream a reality. I can't imagine my life without you, and tonight, I want to take one step closer to making my dream a reality.

“Hermione Jean Granger, will you do me the honor, and give me the pleasure, of becoming my wife?”

Okay, so now I'm crying again. Happy tears, Ron. I just spent ten minutes after writing that staring at the ring on my finger. Mum keeps teasing me that I can't stop rubbing it or looking at it. Dad said that Harry asked him for permission a while ago. Harry waited until what he said was, “The right moment.”

I still can't believe it. I'm afraid that I'll wake up from this wonderful dream. If this is a dream, I never want to wake up! I don't know when we'll actually get married. We talked about it, and we want to travel the world first, so it may be quite a while. But I'm going to be Mrs. Harry Potter! So, I end a letter for the first time like this:

Love from,

The future Mrs. Hermione Jean Potter

P.S. Still have to work on becoming comfortable writing Potter instead of Granger. Just means I'll have to practice, practice, practice! Oh! I just realized that I'll have the same initials as Harry! Wow! HJP! Write us back soon!

August 28th, 1998

Harry/Hermione,

Congrats on both the baby and the engagement! Please give our best to your Mum and Dad. I'd love to see the look on Uncle Harry's face when little baby Granger pulls that messy black hair of Harry's for the first time! I think it'd be wonderful for Teddy to have someone he knows going to Hogwarts with him, that is if your little brother or sister is one of us. Even if they aren't, they will of course be an honorary Weasley!

School is starting back up again. Ginny is of course going back for her final year. McGonagall has offered to everyone in our year to return after last year. I decided to go back myself for a few classes, just the main ones. It'll be nice to have a 'normal' year, but it won't be

the same without you guys. But I think its for the best really. Hermione, you were always WAY ahead of the two of us, and I think you two will learn more by yourselves than here.

Oh, and Harry? Mind if I steal that speech for when I propose to my girl? Not to say that it won't be Padma, but unlike you guys, I haven't been best friends with her for 7 years! Speaking of the lovely lady in my life, she's also going back this year, and she's made Head Girl! She says that she wouldn't be HG if you were coming back Hermione, so she says that she'll try her hardest to keep me in line. Hey, at least I'm smart enough to make friends with the two smartest witches in our year! I also have to tell you that I'm the Quidditch captain this year! Hopefully Ginny pulls herself together and plays Seeker again, we'll definitely need her without you there Harry.

People are still celebrating the downfall of You-Know-Who. Everyone's wondering where you two dissa disapared went off to. Because I'm a part of the "Golden Trio", that's what they're calling us now, I keep getting bugged about it. You know, I used to be jealous of all the attention Harry got growing up, now I think he was right in hating the attention. It's bloody annoying! Answering the same question 18 different times, and trying to say 'I don't know' a thousand different ways is hard! The first few interviews were fun, but now I just want to go and hide. I can't believe how ruddy jealous I was. I want to find a time turner and go back so I hex myself.

I'll be at school when I send my next letter. Things are pretty hectic around here, so I don't know if I'll be able to keep up with the letters. With a little luck, maybe you guys could make it here for Christmas, but if you can't, don't worry about it. Once again, congrats on the little Granger and the engagment.

Ron

November 21st, 1998

Ron,

Sorry we haven't written in a while. We've been out of touch with reality so to speak. Hermione is still visiting our 'elders', and I needed

to take a quick trip to Sydney, so I figured I should let you know that everything is fine. Right now, we're learning all kinds of stuff from the Aboriginal tribes here in Australia. I won't bore you with the details, because I'm sure that next time when Hermione writes, she'll be the one telling you all about it.

Sorry to say, we won't be home for Christmas. We're spending it with Hermione's parents. They'll be leaving for England after the New Year. They want to be home for the birth of their child. We're going to stay here for at least 6 more months, but there's a good chance we'll be home for a couple weeks to be there when the little one is born. We have so much stuff we're doing, it's amazing. The narrow view of magic back home is absurd.

I've got to go, this letter is probably too long anyway for what I was supposed to do. Say hi to everyone, and give them our love. And yes, feel free to 'borrow' my speech. I spent the better part of a week perfecting that. Good luck with Padma,

Harry

December 15th, 1998

Harry/Hermione,

Glad to hear you guys are alright. I figured Hermione would be enjoying the learning part, but you too Harry? Wow. Hermione's a bad influence on you mate! Just kidding Hermione! I'm sure the next letter I get will be pages and pages of loads of stuff you guys have learned. Not quite sure if that's a good thing or not!

Things are going good here. Being here at Hogwarts just isn't the same without the two of you. Padma is helping a lot with that though. She does a good job of keeping my mind off of it a lot of the time, but there are times when I can't help but think about you two. I miss you guys. It's still difficult to be in the common room sometimes. The memories of me and Harry playing chess, while Hermione reads a book on the couch, are always fresh in my mind every time I'm there. Slowly, I feel I'm getting better. Quidditch is helping a lot. I'm working



really hard as captain. It's about the only thing besides Padma that's keeping me sane.

Oh, and Harry, you have my deepest sympathies. Hermione must be quite a little nagger without me there! We were able to keep her under control most of the time. I say that because Padma is working me to death now. Though it is quite nice to be "rewarded" for studying! I know I've said it before, but she's the best thing to happen to me. She keeps me on track, and we don't get under each other's skin.

Everything worked out perfect I think. I look back on it now, and I don't think me and Hermione would have been as good as me and Padma. You two have always gotten on better than me and Hermione. I see that now. I tried to deny it for the longest time. I fancied Hermione since forth year, but I never acted on it until last year. I blew it, but as I said, I think everything worked out just fine. Padma and I work really well together. I guess it's just different than how Hermione was. She likes to tease me about things. I guess that's the big difference: the sense of humor is different, more compatable I think.

By the way, I knew Harry liked you too Hermione, for about as long as well. But because he was my best mate, he buried his feelings. I saw it. I saw it every time he looked at you. He didn't know what it was because of those bloody Dursley's. But I could tell, and I was jealous. It all came to a head sixth year. I was rubbing off on you Hermione, and there was all that friction between you two. With Malfoy, that bloody potions book, the prophecy, and Harry's lessons with Dumbledore, I tried taking advantage of the wedge between you two. It didn't hurt that Ginny was acting like a seeker to Harry's snitch all year. She didn't care about Dean. Sad part is, he knew it. I was so upset at him for 'using' Ginny, when really it was the other way around.

You might be wondering how I know this. I read her diary. Not on purpose mind you. But, I found a girl's diary underneath the couch in the common room with no name on it. So, being the nosy guy I am, I read it. When I started reading it, I realized it was Ginny's. I shouldn't have read it, but I needed to know how she felt about you Harry. It

disturbed me to no end. She had everything planned out, from the beginning of our fifth year to your wedding, even names for children. It was like you had no say in it. It was just a fact that she was going to be Ginny Potter.

Don't get me wrong, she didn't try love potions or anything like that, she just had it set in her mind that you were going to be her boyfriend, her fiancée, her husband, father of her children. But now, she's slowly getting it that you're not hers. She's at least trying to date other guys. I'm trying to be a good brother and NOT interfere, because I don't want her dwelling on you, because she HAS to get over you. And if I interfere, she might not. It's hard, but it has to be this way.

Anyway, Padma's nagging me to get my Potions essay done. Hope you two have a Happy Christmas, a Happy New Year, and especially a Happy Anniversary! Yes, I remembered! It's been a year for you two! Congrats! Write back soon!

Ron

February 15th, 1999

Dear Ron,

Big news Ron! Right now, as I write this, I'm sitting in a room at St. Mungo's. Yes, we're back in England for the time being. We definitely want to come see you at Hogsmeade. If I remember correctly, there should be a trip this coming weekend. But if I'm mistaken, and it was this past weekend, we'll just sneak into Hogwarts and see you!

Now, the REALLY big news! Please welcome Helena Abigail Granger to the world! I have a little sister!! I'm so excited! Harry's really happy too! Helena is pronounced Hell-In-Uh. Harry was a prat and made some stupid joke about having her middle name be Handbasket. Twerp. My Dad thought it was funny though. Mum didn't. So that just shows that us female's are smarter and don't give into silly little play-on-word games. Ugh. Boys! Men! Whatever!

Getting back to my beautiful baby sister. She was born at 4:55 pm, February 14th, and was 40.6cm and 3.2kg. Harry is in love with her!

My Dad and Harry keep hogging her! She already has them wrapped around her tiny little finger. I think my Mum has held her the least, and she's the one who delivered! Harry's definitely going to make a great dad one day. His face lights up whenever he's holding Helena, and he's had a grin on his face ever since he first held her. I think he's imagining that she's his little girl instead of what will be his sister-in-law.

Harry and I already agreed we're not having kids until our traveling is over, but I can see that our discussion has gone from the abstract to the tangible. At first it seemed that children were a part of some distant future. But now that he's held Helena, I can see the change already in him. He said to me, "I know", this morning when I was watching him with her. He knows we're not ready, but if there was any doubt he wanted children before, it was completely erased yesterday. And to be honest, I know we're not ready, but a small part of me wants it now too. If not for me, then for Harry. The way he grew up, I always wondered how he would handle little ones. I have no doubt he will be the complete opposite of the Dursley's. He'll probably spoil our kids, your kids, Helena, Teddy, and any your brothers/Ginny have, maybe even Luna's too.

Okay, enough about kids and my wonderful little sister. Since we hope to see you in a few days, I won't write pages and pages of what we've been doing. It's much better to tell you in person anyway, then we can show you what we've learned.

We've been with an Aboriginal group in New South Wales, near the Murray River. This particular group is well known throughout the Australian magical community because of their seemingly unique magic. They seem to have a wonderful grasp of earth magic, and some on water magic. Their earth magic is used solely for the purpose of growing crops and keeping plants and the soil healthy. Their water magic is used to irrigate their crops, and they have a rudimentary aqueduct system. While this may seem simplistic and easy, elemental magic is by far the hardest magic to learn, control, and master. Their magic somehow energizes the water in a way that makes crops grow better. The earth magic could lead to huge strides in Herbology and by extension, potion making. This is definitely something we want to talk to Neville about.

That is what Harry and I have been learning the past few months. It's been amazing! We still have about two months worth of learning and mastering, then we're planning on going to America. I've read that the Native Americans have an unorthodox way of human-to-animal transfiguration. Not much is known about it, so we're eager to study it, and hopefully master it.

Now about all the things you mentioned about the four of us; me, you, Harry and Ginny. It's all in the past Ron. I'm just glad to be where I'm at right now. I get the feeling so does Harry. We wouldn't change a thing with how things have turned out. I knew about Ginny's obsession with Harry, though I never thought she would use Michael and Dean like that. I guess part of that is my fault by telling her that she should at least try to date other guys. I didn't think she would only do it to try and grab Harry's attention. But I am glad to hear she's trying to move on.

It's all water under the bridge now Ron. Don't worry about it. We're all in a good place in our lives I think. I'm engaged, you and Padma seem to be going strong, and Ginny is moving on. I just want everyone to be happy.

Alright, I've rambled on enough. I've only gotten about 5 hours of sleep in two days, so I'm going to try and rest up. Maybe if I get lucky, Harry will let me use his lap for a pillow. I can't stand the chairs here! Ugh! Hope to see you soon!

Love from,

Hermione

A.N.: Hope you enjoyed it. By the way, any mistakes in Ron's letters are on purpose. I thought it'd be a fun idea to have mistakes in his letters. He doesn't strike me as the best of writers. I have some fun things planned for the last three chapters. Unexpected but good surprises coming ahead!

## Chapter 8: Hermione's Journal

February 23rd, 1999

This is my first entry into my new journal. My loving fiancée keeps teasing me that this is more of a diary than a journal. But because Harry and I have decided to keep a record of our travels, the term "journal" fits better. We'll both be writing journals, though we both admit I'll be the one with the more detailed logs. However, Harry may have a different perspective on something, so I'll have to be bugging him to write things down in his journal.

I guess I'll begin with what happened this past week. I am happy to say that I'm a big sister now, and I'm very excited about it. Helena is just a bundle of joy that has really added to my life. Spending time with her has been wonderful, except for the time she spit up on my new blouse, THAT was annoying, but worth it all the same. And it was nothing a little magic couldn't fix.

My parents are back home, and Harry and I are staying with them until the end of this week. That's when we leave for Australia to finish our training with the Aborigines, then we move on to America. I'm really looking forward to this trip! When we get to the States, we will be living with the Cherokee's in Oklahoma. They are the largest surviving tribe in America. We will be learning all kinds of natural and animal magic. The highlight of our trip will be learning to be animagi. They have a different way of becoming an animagus than we do here in Europe. What that is I'm not sure, but Harry and I are very eager to try it. Harry more so because it's something to connect him with his Dad, Sirius and Remus.

Getting back to the here and now, this past Saturday we went to Hogsmeade to visit all our friends who are back at Hogwarts. We all met at Three Broomsticks and had a fantastic time...

The party was in full swing. The food was good, the drinks were better, and the company was the best. At no time before had this particular group of friends acted this way. They were able to relax, have fun, and enjoy each other's company without the threat of evil hanging over them.

The bond between the members of this particular group outshone all others. They had fought Umbridge, evil Slytherins, and Death Eaters together. Nearly one-third of the original DA attended the little get-together. Harry Potter and his fiancée Hermione Granger, Ron Weasley and his girlfriend Head Girl Padma Patil, Neville Longbottom, Hannah Abbott, Susan Bones, Luna Lovegood and Ginny Weasley were all crammed into a private room at Three Broomsticks, enjoying their time together.

“Hermione! Can we see it again? Pleeeeeeease?” begged one Hannah Abbott.

Hermione huffed, and lifted her left hand once more, showing off her beautiful engagement ring from Harry. The ring was the most gorgeous thing Hermione, and the other girls for that matter, had ever seen. A .72 carat round diamond was the centerpiece, set in platinum on a platinum band. There were six .31 carat round diamonds, three on each side of the centerpiece. It was a true work of art. The girls oohed and awed once more, as Hermione pretended to be annoyed. But in reality, she was beaming on the inside at all the attention she was receiving.

The one girl not completely happy to see the large rock was one Ginny Weasley. She had agreed to come because her brother Ron begged her to. After deciding to go, she had hoped that this would be her chance to discuss things with Harry, this time hopefully with out a confrontation. She dragged Harry to the corner just to find out if she had any chance with the Boy-Who-Lived.

“So, you love her, huh?” Ginny asked casually.

Harry let out a deep breath as he gazed over at his fiancée. “I love her more than life itself Gin. I'd do anything in my power to make her happy.” Harry had his hands in his pockets, and a goofy smile plastered on his face.

Ginny crossed her arms, and stared at her ex-boyfriend, a sad expression on her face. “Harry... what happened between us? I

thought we had something, you know? I was living my wonderful dream. Did you not feel the same way?"

Harry looked over at Ginny and saw the sadness in her eyes. It wasn't a look he was accustomed to seeing from her. Gone was the fire, the passion; in their place was shyness and pain. A part of him felt bad for her, but he knew in his heart that no other person could make him feel as happy as Hermione.

"Gin, that year was the worst year I ever had at Hogwarts. Hermione and I were at odds most of the year. It nearly broke me, being apart from her. After Cedric and Sirius, I was losing Hermione. And then you came along, and I thought that you could replace her, or at least fill in the hole that was tearing in my heart. I knew you had a crush on me, and I was lonely.

"I shouldn't have taken advantage of your crush on me, but I did. And yes, it felt good for a while. But really, it pales in comparison to what I have now. I'm sorry for that Ginny. I got your hopes up, especially at the Burrow, on my birthday. I hope in time you can forgive me for doing that to you. I do care for you, but not in the way you want me to, and I sincerely hope you can find what I've found with Hermione."

Harry reached out and gave her a light hug, and walked back to Hermione. Ginny hung her head in defeat. Her last hope, her last chance at achieving her life-long dream, was gone. Harry would never be hers. The fantasy she had had since she was six was shattered once and for all. She knew Harry deserved all the happiness in the world, and had hoped that it would be her that gave it to him. But as she watched him hug his fiancée and kiss her cheek, she saw once more his face light up. She took a deep, calming breath, and let go of the Boy-Who-Lived, now determined to find someone who could make her as happy as Harry did Hermione.

Finally, Ginny walked over to Hermione, and gave her a huge hug. She whispered in her ear, "You look so happy and so radiant Hermione, I can only hope to find a man who makes me feel the way Harry does with you. And I hope you still consider me to be your Maid-of-Honor."

As they separated, Hermione smiled widely at Ginny, and nodded her head. "Of course, you are my sister in all but blood, right? And besides, Helena won't be old enough when we get married. She has to settle for Flower Girl."

Ginny smiled, and the two young women walked back to the group. Hermione walked into the waiting arms of Harry, and Ginny stood next to them. Harry and Neville were talking as Hermione's eyes found something interesting, and interrupted their conversation.

"So Neville, how long?"

"How long what Hermione?" Neville asked.

Hermione made a point to stare down at Neville's hand, which was intertwined with one of Hannah Abbott's. Neville followed her gaze, and when he realized what she was looking at, he smiled.

"Two months. Almost three. I asked her to the Winter Ball in early December. We've been together since."

"I'm glad to hear it Nev. You deserve to be happy," Harry interjected.

"I hope we can be as happy as you two are," Hannah said as she gave Neville a quick peck on the cheek. "Though we have some catching up to do, since we haven't been denying our love for seven years," Hannah continued, smirking at the engaged couple.

The party continued into the evening until everyone still attending Hogwarts had to go back to the castle. Harry and Hermione apparated to the Granger's, where they were staying until their return to Australia. The rest of the night was spent packing and preparing to go back, along with a little time set aside to spend with little Helena.

...It was nice to see everybody. Seeing Ron and Padma holding hands and being together like they are is definitely a contrast to what I remember from the Yule Ball. I'm happy for the both of them, but I'm still trying to get that image of Padma sitting at the Ball glaring at Ron out of my head, though I'm sure she still uses that look on him from time to time.



I'm really happy for Neville and Hannah. It's the first time I've seen him with a girlfriend, and Hannah's a really nice girl, so they seem well matched. Ginny seems to have finally given up on Harry. I'm glad that she's come around, and I hope she can find herself a great guy.

May 2nd, 1999

Oh my goodness! We just had our "final exam" with the Aborigines! I can't believe what this last week has been like. Learning this stuff has been really difficult, but this past week has tied it all together. I know I've complained for the past two months about all this stuff not making sense in the big picture, but now, I get it. It's hard to explain, so I'll make an analogy that might make sense.

Imagine teaching a full grown adult to walk. How would you explain it? If you know how to walk, it seems SO simple. But what actually goes into walking? Think about it. Heel-to-toe, bend the knee, balance, timing how to move your legs so you don't fall, etc. Now imagine learning each individual part completely separate from the act of walking. That's what we've been doing. Learning the individual steps to the earth and water magic. And this last week, we started walking, relatively speaking. It's so incredible!

Harry caught onto the earth magic quicker and I got the water faster. Wow, look at us, mud! Ha! Anyway, Harry has started applying the earth magic to dueling! It's been incredible to watch him develop these new skills.

For example, the normal application of a particular spell, "Tectamus", is used for moving mounds of earth from one place to another, or smoothing out a plot of land. Harry has used it to produce an earthen wall to block spells. He makes his wall about a millimeter thick using the original spell, changes it to about ten centimeters thick (using a version of the Engorgio charm), and then transfigures it into solid granite (a simple transfig; dirt-granite). It's a perfect wall to block the Advada Kadavra! And it takes him just under two seconds to erect the wall. It's taken him almost the entire two months since we've been back here to get it perfected and to do it so fast.

Why is this important? Once perfected, any normal witch or wizard will be able to block the AK. At least, if they're not inside a building. Before, only the best of the best, like Dumbledore, could conjure a slab of granite capable of blocking the killing curse. Conjuraton is something only the best can perform. Simple transfiguration like what Harry has been working on will do wonders for the average witch or wizard!

Me on the other hand, well, I can water every plant in the house. I can make water flow uphill. Maybe I should do like Harry does and try experimenting. We'll see.

About our "final exam", all we did was go through all of the spells we've learned in our time here and then used them as they were intended to be used. To be honest, I was more stressed out about our O.W.L.'s than I was here. I think it has a lot to do with the fact that we're learning all these new things because we want to, not because we have to to pass some test.

I've really noticed a difference in Harry since we've begun to do our own research and studying. He's always been interested in learning the spells in a practical sense, but never liked doing the homework. I think that's why he did so well in DADA, because a lot of it was focused on the application rather than the theory. Now, since we don't have a book to read or foot after foot of parchment to write, he's flourishing. I'm so proud of him!

July 5th, 1999

I'm sitting here watching the sun come up today, and it's spectacular! We were treated yesterday to an American holiday called Independence Day. It celebrates the day that the American Colonies declared themselves free from the British government. We got to participate in a barbecue with hamburgers and hot dogs. Then last night, we saw a wonderful fireworks show. I must say, not a bad way to celebrate a holiday.

Our Animagus training is coming slowly. I know we've only been at this for almost a month and a half, but still. It feels like we're crawling

along with it. Technically, yes, we're WAY ahead of where most people are. But it doesn't feel like it.

Perhaps now that I have a better grasp on the differences on becoming an Animagus, I can explain it a little better. Every witch or wizard has an animal form. It's just of matter of finding it and being able to complete the necessary steps to achieve it. Now, there are, apparently, two different ways of achieving this goal. They're both very similar, only differing in the beginning.

1 - The "Normal" way. This is the technique that most registered Animagi use. This is also the technique that the Marauders used back when they were learning (when Harry learned this, he wanted to forgo what we were going to do, but the elders and I convinced him to try it the "other" way).

This process begins with meditation. The purpose is to look within yourself and "call" out to your inner animal. Most of the time, a person's prominent personality traits come through in the form. The Marauders are a perfect example of this. Each form represented each individual person in the group. James became a stag: Proud, protective, and a little vain. Sirius became a large dog: Loved attention, strong, loyal. Peter became a rat: Enough said.

2 – The "Other" way. This is the process the Native American's have used generation after generation. They say that their technique is quicker to learn, better connected to the animal world, and allows for a faster, smoother transformation.

This process also begins with meditation. But here's the major difference. Instead of looking inward, the person reaches outward to the world around them. The person meditates and "feels" out toward the natural world. When said person achieves a "connection", they must claim that connection, called a "token". It can be anything; a leaf, a feather, grass, bark, another person's hair, nearly anything. When the person achieves enough tokens, usually 10-15, it is time to move on to the next stage.

From here, both processes take similar paths. The next step is to make a potion. But each process involves a different, yet similar,

potion. The “Normal” process involves the Animagus potion. This potion automatically transforms the drinker into their animagus form, if one has already found their inner animal. The potion can be lethal if ingested by someone who has not found his or her inner animal. The drinker then stays in the animagus form for five minutes. The final step in this process is to slowly practice transforming into your animagus form.

The “Other” process involves a potion that is called the Animal Spirit potion. We won't be allowed to witness the creation of the potion, but we were told in order to make it, our tokens will be required. Because we're required to put in our own tokens, the potion isn't lethal to us. Then specific runes are drawn on our bodies, and then at midnight on a full moon, we drink our potion. We stay in our form for five to ten minutes, and then we get turned back. From there, it's the same process: practice, practice, practice!

December 26th, 1999

Happy Christmas! Well, a day late, but still. We just got back to America to continue our animagus training. Who would have thought that I would have a bird for my animagus form? I HATE flying. At least I used to. I still don't like flying on a broom. Harry tried to take me up on Ron's new broom over the holiday. I'll probably always hate it.

I should note that when I say Ron's new broom, I should say Ron designed and crafted it himself. He's apprenticing with a broom maker. He had a try-out over the summer with the Cannons, his favorite team, but he's didn't make it. So instead he's decided to try and make brooms. He's definitely got a passion for them, so I think he'll succeed. He says he wants to make something better than the Firebolt, but he also wants to make quality brooms for those that can't afford them normally. A noble idea indeed!

It was wonderful to spend Christmas with both Harry and Helena! Mum and Dad certainly enjoyed having Harry over for holidays. Dad and Harry went out to the course the ONE day it was actually sunny. Gits. Prats. MEN!! Ugh. Did they think that, I don't know, perhaps Mum and I wanted to do something outside with the two of them?

Nope, just a simple: “Hey Harry, it's sunny...” “I'll get the clubs...” Boys!

Helena had a blast for her first Christmas. Harry laughed at me for giving her the complete works of Shakespeare, but I thought since she's MY sister, I'd know what she'd like a little bit more than my dear fiancée. And guess what he got her? Does he get her dolls? No. Does he get her a coloring book, building blocks, or anything else a “normal” child gets? No. What does he get her? An updated version of Quidditch through the Ages, and the latest Hogwarts: A History. Somehow, I think he got them as a joke, and I'm the only one that doesn't quite get it. Mum and Dad snickered when the presents were opened. I think they're wonderful gifts for her. Even if she's a muggle, it'll help her understand the magical world.

It's been almost a week and a half since we did the animagus ritual. I'm starting to notice the “side effects” of being an animagus. It's amazing the bleed through of the abilities.

I look back on our first transformation with a sense of awe. Harry's reaction when he saw my form was unforgettable. I still get emotional when I think about it...

The bright, full moon shone down on everyone. A large bonfire was lit, providing a nice source of warmth on the chilly night. A group of 12 encircled the bonfire, all there in support of the young couple standing in the center. Tonight was their night to perform a sacred ritual no one outside the tribe had taken part in since the late 19th century.

Harry swallowed the nasty, thick, gray potion in one gulp. It took all of his resolve to not allow the potion to come back up. He stood in the middle of circle, his elders and fellow tribesmen surrounding him. Hermione was next to him, holding her own bottle, with her own potion ready for her when the time came.

With a shutter, Harry began his transformation. His body started shrinking and started to sprout feathers. His mouth and nose formed a beak. His arms turned to wings, his feet and toes into razor-sharp talons. When he finished, he was small; his body length was perhaps 40-42cm. He started turning his head, trying to look at himself.

Stretching out his arms/wings, he inwardly smiled, seeing his bluish-black wing color. His wingspan looked to be about 90cm. His eyes shined with their characteristic emerald green. He turned his head to look at his fiancée, and cocked his head to the side, trying to say to her, 'Hey! What am I? What do I look like?'

Hermione looked at the bird before her. Her mouth was agape, her hands trying to cover up her surprise. "Harry, you're beautiful! My goodness, you're a Peregrine Falcon! You're gorgeous!"

Harry smiled, at least as much as a bird can smile. He flapped he's wings, time and time again, finally achieving lift. He got five feet off the ground before gliding back down to the ground. He repeated this routine for the next few minutes, trying to get used to the feeling of broom-less flight.

Finally, towards the end of his allotted time, he decided to give flying a try. He flapped his wings, gave a small hop, and took off. He flapped his wings harder and harder, gaining altitude with each stroke. The feeling he got from flying was unlike any other. He had only flown on a broom a handful of times in the past few years. Now, he could do it anytime he wanted. He was a falcon! 'This is AMAZING! I can see and hear so much better, and flying like this is even better than on a broom!'

He circled overhead a few more times, then decided to have one more bit of fun. Remembering how good it felt to dive on a broom, he decided to do it as a falcon. From high above the spectators, he began. Faster and faster he fell, reaching 150 km/h in mid-dive. He pulled up and landed in the middle of the circle. The elders surrounded him, and reverted him back to human form.

Hermione rushed over and threw her arms around him. "Harry, you're so beautiful! That dive was amazing! Do you know what you are? You're a Peregrine Falcon! They're the fastest bird of prey in the world!"

"Wow," was all Harry could eek out. After a couple minutes of recovery, he spoke again. "It's your turn now, isn't it?"

Hermione nodded and stood in the center of the circle. She too swallowed the disgusting potion in one go. And like Harry, she gave a big shudder as the taste washed over her taste buds. She too began to shrink. She too began to sprout feathers all over her body. She was turning into a bird as well! But she was not a falcon like Harry. No, instead, she resembled a bird close to Harry's heart. His surprise at her form was ten times greater than her reaction to him. She had expected him to be some sort of bird, but for her form to be one as well?

"No way! Merlin's beard! Hermione! You look like... like..." Harry sobbed. Tears were streaking down his face. He fell to his knees, kneeling in front of his fiancée. He couldn't believe his eyes. He was, for all intent and purposes, looking at a ghost.

Worry and concern filled the eyes of the bird in front of him. Hermione didn't know what was wrong. Was she deformed? Did the transformation not complete? Was she ugly? She had no idea what was wrong... until he spoke again.

"You... Hedwig... no way... you look like Hedwig, Hermione..." he choked out from behind the tears. He continued to stare in disbelief at the snowy owl before him. It had been over two years since he lost his closest companion. The night he escaped from Privet Drive, he lost her, killed by a Killing Curse meant for him. He never had time to mourn her loss. Too many things happened too quickly for that to happen. After the war, he seemed to forget about his owl. But now, here she was once more, but one major difference. Instead of Hedwig's pale-yellow eyes, were Hermione's chocolate orbs.

As he wept, Hermione hopped over to him. She flapped her wings repeatedly, and was able to get off the ground. As she did, her first landing spot was on Harry's right shoulder, which was the typical landing spot of his former owl. She rubbed her head against his cheek, and nipped his ear lovingly. Harry leaned his head into her, and stroked her feathers affectionately. He sniffled several times, trying to get his emotions under control.

"Hermione, why don't you try flying around a little bit? It really is fun once you get used to it."

The snowy owl on his shoulder cocked her head, and raised an imperceptible eyebrow at him, as if to say, 'Are you nuts?' He chuckled at her response. It was the exact type of reaction he expected out of his "I-Hate-Flying" fiancée. He softly stroked her beak, which she seemed to enjoy.

"Hermione, you're an owl. You have to fly. You'll look silly as an owl walking on the ground all the time. Come on, you got up to my shoulder didn't you?" At his words of encouragement, she fluffed out her feathers and stuck out her chest in defiance. "How about I just toss you in the air then, and if you fall like a rock to the ground, that's your fault. How does that sound?"

She clapped her beak in annoyance at him. Reluctantly, she gave in. She turned around, and leaped off his shoulder. Beating her wings as fast as she could, she slowly gained altitude. Higher and higher she flew until she felt uncomfortable, which turned out to be about five meters off the ground. She circled a few times before coming back down and landed back on Harry's shoulder.

He smiled at her, and stroked her feathers. "You look beautiful Hermione. But if I call you Hedwig by mistake a few times, don't take it personally, ok?" She hooted, acknowledging his words. Finally, she hopped off his shoulder and glided back to solid ground, where the elders transformed her back.

Harry raced over and embraced her. "You're gorgeous Hermione."

"Thanks Harry. I guess I'm going to have to get used to flying now, aren't I?"

"Understatement of the year, sweetheart."

I'll never forget the look in Harry's eyes when he saw me. It was a sad, but yet loving look. It was at that moment I realized he had never mourned Hedwig's death. She was such a special owl. I don't know what to make of the fact that I apparently look EXACTLY like her. I did taken off Harry, as he did me. So perhaps my magic knew how deeply he cared for her, and it also knows how much he loves me,



and sort of combined the two. I'll never really know. But believe it or not, I'm absolutely ecstatic to be an owl, and I hope to honor Hedwig's memory.

That was the week before holiday. We didn't practice our transformation over the break. We also decided not to tell anyone about our animagus forms. We want to be able to actually turn into our forms when we tell them. It will be funny to see Ron's reaction to my owl. I definitely look forward to flying along side Harry and Ron for once.

June 2nd, 2000

Wow. Just... wow. I never thought I'd feel any different. But I do. A little sore after last night, but that was to be expected. Waking up this morning as Hermione Potter when just yesterday I was Hermione Granger is a world of difference. I awoke this morning in the arms of my husband. Not boyfriend, not fiancée, but husband. Wow. I'm married!! I'm a wife, and I have a husband who loves me! It's almost overwhelming. It was such a beautiful ceremony. Mum did such a fantastic job setting up everything. Harry was so handsome! And my dress... well...

Harry stood at the alter, dressed to the nines. His tux was custom made for him, and was magically enhanced to always fit. Between Ron, Neville and himself, they had decided that he would forgo a tie. Though Hermione knew it was mostly because the boys hated wearing ties. She tried talking them into wearing them, but having the groom, best man, and both groomsmen all in agreement, she finally gave in and let them go tie-less.

Ron was a step down from Harry, in his spot as Best Man. The groomsmen were Neville Longbottom and George Weasley, who were a step below Ron. Across the aisle stood the Maid of Honor, Ginny Weasley, along with bridesmaids Luna Lovegood and Padma Patil.

The front row of the groom's side consisted of: Mr. and Mrs. Weasley, Bill and his wife Fleur, along with their newborn daughter Victoire, Andromeda Tonks and two-year-old Teddy Lupin.

The front row of the bride's side consisted of: Walter (after he walked his daughter down the aisle) and Rose Granger, along with one-year-old Helena, Hermione's maternal grandmother Jean Anderson, and Headmistress Minerva McGonagall.

The ceremony was being held at a church close to the Granger residence, much to Mrs. Weasley's dismay. Harry and Hermione had both agreed to a strict Muggle wedding. The reception was going to be held at the Granger's house, while a small wizarding ceremony was to be held once the newlyweds came back from their honeymoon.

The church organ blared out the beginning notes to the very familiar tune. Hermione, the beautiful bride, walked towards the man of her dreams, with her proud papa, Walter Granger, on her arm. Her dress was simple, yet elegant. No long train, no fancy head dressing, no veil. It was a rather plain, strapless dress, exposing her toned and tanned shoulders. It was snug at the top, but flowed out as it reached the ground. Her brown hair could be described as anything but bushy. Her style resembled waves of a brown ocean crashing down to her mid-back, with one extremely long, curled strand falling down along her left cheek. A small tiara, a family heirloom from her mother's side, adorned her head.

The bride's face glowed; not because of the small amount of make-up, but because of the feelings building up inside her. She had been dreaming of this moment for years. At first, it was some generic boy, some faceless groom. Then her dream changed. Her husband-to-be became someone that she knew all too well; that of her best friend, Harry Potter. But as she grew older, it seemed the handsome, emerald-eyed boy would never look at her that way. So the man awaiting her at the end of the isle became that of her other best friend, Ron Weasley.

But all that changed one fateful night, a night she'd never forget. Harry Potter, the boy every girl wanted, wanted her. The man who first waited for her in her dreams, was now waiting for her in reality. And she couldn't be any happier.

As Hermione reached the alter, she turned to face the man she loved. The two of them wanted to honor James and Lily Potter in some way during the ceremony. Holding a bouquet of white lilies, a tribute to Harry's mother, was the bride, as her husband-to-be wore a pair of stag cufflinks in honor of his father.

The minister talked about friendship, love, and commitment. But the bride and groom hardly heard a word. They were far too busy staring into each other's eyes, a pair of matching, goofy grins plastered on their faces. The only thing that broke them out of their happy little world was a sharp elbow to Harry's ribs.

Harry jerked his head away from Hermione's lovely face and glared at his Best Man, who happened to be the owner of said elbow.

"This is where you say, 'I do', unless I'm mistaken," Ron said quietly, trying to say it with as little movement of his mouth as possible. However, all those standing with the bride and groom heard him, and snickered at the pair. Both of them had the decency to blush at their inattention to the proceedings.

A large grin crept across Harry's face as he turned his attention back to his now blushing bride. A warm feeling came over his body as the words formed in his mind. His mouth opened, and the words he'd been longing to say for almost a year came forth.

"Hermione Jean Granger, with all my heart, I say... I do..."

Hermione had her eyes locked onto Harry's, and a well of tears formed. The minister continued his part.

"And do you, Hermione Jean Granger... take this man to be your lawfully wedded husband... to have and to hold, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, 'till death do you part?"

If it was possible, her smile grew as her answer was on the tip of her tongue. "Harry James Potter, with all my heart, I say... I do..."

Without waiting for the minister to say so, Harry wrapped his arms around his bride. She responded by snaking her arms around his

neck and pulling him in tight. Vaguely hearing the words 'kiss' and 'bride', their lips met for the first time as Mr. and Mrs. Potter.

... I still don't know which kiss sticks out in my mind more, that kiss or our first kiss. Both are significant, but I don't think any kiss will ever be as important as our first. It represents the beginning of 'us'.

I look back on everything that's happened since that kiss, and it still amazes me. As I sit here writing this, I can't imagine being this happy if that kiss never happened. Could I have been happy with Ron? I'm sure we could have made it work, but is that really happiness? Could I have loved him as deeply as I do Harry? No, and that's the harsh reality of it. I think even if I married Ron, I'd always choose Harry, even after 20 years of marriage to Ron and a dozen children.

And if I may be so bold, I think the same thing would have happened if Harry and Ginny had married. Could a marriage have worked between the two of them? Sure. But I think Harry and I work better together than Harry and Ginny. Though I must say I'm rather biased! He IS my husband after all. I hate to say this, but Ginny is too much of a 'fan girl' as Harry puts it. Sure, she knows Harry, but she still likes to think of him as a hero. I'll never understand why that girl still thinks of him that way after all this time.

Moving on, Harry and I have seriously discussed children recently. We both really want them, especially after little Helena came along. We're in agreement that we don't want a clan of Potter's. As much as we love the Weasley's, we both can't imagine running a household like that! I think we're going to end up having three or so, depending on a multitude of factors. As much as Harry wants a son, I think he wants a daughter the most. Don't ask me why though. If I were to guess however, I would say it's all Helena's fault. That boy fell in love the second he held her.

The sun is beginning to shine through the window of our hotel room, and Harry's starting to stir. I think I'll perform my wifely duties and wake him up properly!

July 9th, 2000

Harry and I have just gotten back to my parents house after Ron and Padma's wedding. I'm exhausted! I don't think I was this tired after my own! It was a beautiful event, that's for sure. And I do mean an event! From the pre-wedding party, to the procession, to the actual wedding, and the reception, it was certainly a busy day for everyone.

I don't think anyone was surprised that Parvati was the Maid of Honor, but I was stunned when I was asked to be a bridesmaid. I mean yes, Padma could have asked simply because she was a bridesmaid at my wedding, but it was still a surprise.

Of course Harry was the Best Man. He really got into it. Even with all the good-natured teasing Ron and George gave him during our wedding, I swear he gave it back to Ron just as much. But it was at the reception where Harry really turned it on...

Underneath a large canopy, table after table was filled with family members and guests of the bride and groom. The Weasley's and Patil's were both large families, and today made it rather obvious. Over 200 people showed up to the wedding. Padma was the first Patil of her generation to marry, and most of her family came. Ron was the youngest male Weasley, so most of his family showed up too.

With Mr. Weasley a high-ranking official in the Ministry now, most of his co-workers, including the Minister of Magic himself, Kingsley Shacklebolt, attended the event as well. This was without question the largest wedding in decades within the wizarding world. The largest would have been the wedding between Harry Potter and Hermione Granger, but because of their decision to go with their muggle-style wedding, the Weasley/Patil matrimony became the "it" wedding.

It was a bright, sunny, Sunday evening. The reception was well underway. Dinner had been served, and several speeches followed, including Padma's father, her sister Parvati, and Mr. Weasley. The time then came for the Best Man to stand and deliver a toast.

Harry Potter, seated to the immediate right of the groom, arose from his chair, holding in his right hand his glass of champagne, and loudly

cleared his throat. The crowd immediately quieted down and gave him their full attention.

“Um... I suppose this is the part of the reception where I tell embarrassing stories about my best friend. Merlin knows he did it to me. Everyone knows that I'm a nice guy and normally wouldn't stoop to that level. But... today is a special day, and that means I'll have to make an exception. So... Ron...” Harry said, smiling down at the groom, his brother in all but blood. He clapped him on the back and continued. “Which story should I start with?”

Ron, trying to be a good sport, weakly smiled back, and shrugged his shoulders. He knew Harry could roast him on an open fire, but he was sincerely hoping that the Boy-Who-Lived would take it easy on him.

“How about the time you spit up slugs?” Harry said, laughing at the disgusted look on Ron's face. The crowd seemed intrigued, but Harry had other ideas. “No? How about the time Fred and George turned your hair purple before that trip to Hogsmeade in fifth year? Or the time that McLaggen decided to give you keeper lessons, and you had the greatest look on your face because you were so disgusted by what he was telling you? Hmmmm...”

Harry started to rub his chin, seeming to be deep in thought. Ron's eyes started to go wide as he watched Harry pull a folded piece of parchment out of his pocket. The red head knew this wasn't going to be good. And it wasn't.

“No... I think I'll read this. Being Harry Potter has its advantages I'm finding out. Especially when it comes to finding embarrassing information pertaining this fine young man seated to my left. I hold in my hand a very important piece of parchment. Why is it important you ask? It contains some special lyrics to a song that was invented while we were at Hogwarts. But I believe I need to give most of you the background story for this to really hit home.”

Ron, and every person that had attended Hogwarts with the Golden Trio, knew of the particular song that Harry was referring to. “Weasley is Our King” was quite famous during their 5th and 6th years. Harry

launched into a grandiose explanation about the song; about how it started off as a Slytherin joke, and about how it got turned into a fight song for the Gryffindor's, more specifically Ron. Harry finished with his long-winded, historical and hysterical account of the now infamous song, and moved on to explain to everyone just why this was important.

"You see... I got this from a girl who shall remain nameless. Procuring this beautiful little piece of evidence was rather difficult, but she owed me one. And in all honesty, she wanted to get Ronnie-kins here just as much as I did. So, without further adieu..." Harry cleared his throat, and began.

"Weasley is my King,

Weasley is my King,

He always makes my heart sing,

Weasley is my King.

I want him day after day,

He's the best looking guy in the D.A.,

Slytherin he will most certainly slay,

Weasley is always ready to play.

Ronnie is easy on the eye,

I want a piece of his pie,

He makes my tongue doth tie,

Weasley is my guy,

Weasley keeps the quaffle out,

He's the best beyond a reasonable doubt,

From the tops of towers I shall shout,

Weasley is what its all about

Weasley is my King,

Weasley is my King,

He always makes my heart sing,

Weasley is my King.”

Several people were snickering and chuckling throughout Harry's reading. The person most notable was his wife, Hermione. Ron's cheek's were flushed, and was thoroughly embarrassed. He was wishing he hadn't teased Harry so much at his reception, because this was easily ten times worse. Whoever wrote the new lyrics was as good as dead in his mind. Padma was chuckling as well, but was also a little curious as to who wrote the creepy lyrics.

After the reaction had died down, Harry spoke again. “Now friends, I'm not here to destroy the poor grooms confidence, nor make dear Padma jealous. I simply needed to pay him back after what he did to me. And I believe I have most certainly accomplished my goal if I do say so myself.”

Harry folded the parchment back up and put it back in his pocket. He raised the glass that was still in his hand, and everyone else followed suit. Harry then began the real toast.

“Ron, you're my best friend, my brother in all but blood. You, your brothers, your sister, your Mum, your Dad, you all have treated me as family, and accepted both Hermione and myself into it. For that, I cannot thank you enough. Now, I stand here, looking to my left, welcoming into the family another non-redhead. Padma, I hope you know what you're getting yourself into. Because I certainly didn't. But I couldn't be any happier to call them my family, and so I say to you, Padma Patil-Weasley, welcome to the family!”



... I still don't know for sure just who wrote those lyrics. I can't believe how many people thought it was me! Even at the height of my little crush on Ron, I could NEVER have written something that hideous. I have my own ideas of who wrote it. I think it was either Luna or Lavender. Which one I don't know. I'd put my money on Lavender though. She had been chasing after Ron for a while before they were dating. Plus she seems to be the type to write something that sappy.

Well, in a few days, we're off to Tibet and more training. Supposedly, the monks there have several meditation techniques that can build and strengthen a person's magical core. That should take us approximately a year to complete. Then our next trip will be to Japan, for "ninja" training, as Harry calls it. I don't think that will take too long, considering what we've learned already. Perhaps four to six months is all. Finally, curse breaking in Egypt. That should be fun.

My eyes are drooping, and my dear husband is beckoning me to come to bed, so I guess I should finish this up. We have a lot planned for the next few years. Sometimes it seems overwhelming. Looking back, it would have been nice to learn some of this stuff during the war, but as they say, hindsight is 20/20. But I'm happy how things turned out for the most part. I have a loving husband, my parents are very much alive, and I have a group of wonderful friends. The future looks really bright.

A/N: Ok. 2 more chapters. Wow. Thanks for reading and enjoying Vanilla!

## Chapter 9: Mutatus Vita

“Reducto!”

The Blasting Hex did just that, turning a once solid, 4,000 year-old stone basin into dust. Unfortunately, the basin wasn't exactly the target in mind. The intended receiver of said hex was an animated marble statue of Bast, the protector of the pharaohs, to the right of it.

Huddled behind a wall of granite were two Curse-Breaker trainees, Harry and Hermione Potter. The wall was a specialty of Harry's, one he learned from studying earth magic in Australia. Thankfully for the pair, the arrows and javelins being tossed their way had no chance of penetrating Harry's near 25cm thick wall.

After firing off the stray Blasting Hex, Harry ducked back behind the wall. He cursed at himself for missing his animated enemy. Hermione however, had no sympathy.

“So, still sticking with your old stand-by Harry? You know it's not as effective as some others we know.” Hermione asked calmly, acting as though she wasn't under attack from a dozen marble statues.

“Yes well... using the same hex at the same time as my lovely wife is just tacky sweetheart,” Harry responded in a boring, matter-of-fact tone.

“That hex is so fourth year!” she retorted, trying her best to mimic a girl friend she met while in America, using the best valley-girl voice she could. “Now, let me show you how it's done, Mr. Potter.”

Hermione took a deep breath, and quickly stood up, spun around and shot off a powerful spell they learned in Japan. “Bombido!”

The spell hit one of the statues square in the chest. The resulting explosion took out two more surrounding statues. Masonry was flying all over the tomb, and the resulting dust cloud made it difficult to see the other nine assailants.

Hermione ducked back down behind the wall, a playful smirk on her face. "See, much more effective that way, Harry."

Harry could only shake his head at the reaction of his wife. "You know, you are not the same bushy-haired, know-it-all, rule-abiding school girl I met on the Hogwarts Express over ten years ago. You've turned into some creature that's hardly recognizable from that innocent little thing. What happened? Oh, hold that thought..."

Harry spun around, and levitated a couple dozen small rocks on the other side of the wall. With a non-verbal incantation, he banished them towards the oncoming, animated representations of Bast. A split-second later, he casted an enlargement charm on the rocks, turning them into cannon-ball sized boulders. The effect on the statues was immediate and devastating. The flying projectiles tore through the remaining enemies. Some had their arms blown off, others their legs, some both, a few had their heads removed, still others had their bodies utterly pulverized.

After casting the spells, Harry had ducked back down behind the wall to avoid any debris that might rain down upon them. Both Harry and Hermione listened intently, trying to hear if their foes had fallen. Several seconds passed without a sound, and they both peeked over the wall. What they saw was pile after pile of rubble.

Hermione turned to her husband, and shook her head. "Show-off."

Harry nonchalantly shrugged his shoulders, and stood up. "You started it."

"What?" Hermione asked, a shocked expression on her face as she stood next to Harry.

"I said... You started it. You teased me about trying to take them out one at a time. You then proceeded to try and show me up by taking out multiple targets. I simply ended it. That's all. And I believe it's 123 to 95 now, Hermione."

Harry transfigured his wall back into dirt, and walked over towards the large, hieroglyph and artwork covered door. He ran his hands all over the door, knowing full well this was not his specialty.

“Well, perhaps I could catch-up to you if you weren't going through them like Ron goes through food at the dinner table! And honestly Harry! You know you're horrible opening doors. You're barely passable at Runes now, though I'll grant you that you've made some big strides since we've been here in Egypt.”

“I'll have you know I can open a door with the best of them, it's just when they put passwords in the form of runes that I happen to falter a little bit. Besides, you have to be good for something other than looking dead sexy,” Harry said, smirking at Hermione.

Hermione scoffed at her husband's comment. She walked over to the door and ran her hands over four specific runes in a specific order. The large, stone door roared to life. The door sank into the floor below, revealing the entranceway to the burial chamber. As the dust settled, the pair walked in, followed by the large, unbreakable jars filled with Hermione's blue flames floating behind them. The light from the flames illuminated the chamber, revealing not gold, nor precious stones, but something, at least to Hermione, far more valuable.

Hermione walked over to a large stone slab, where several items made out of bronze were sitting. She waved her wand over them, checking to make sure that they weren't cursed. When she saw that they were fine, she picked up what appeared to be a bronze scalpel. She examined the other items, noting that several looked similar to what her parents used in their dentistry practice.

“Harry, do you realize what we've just stumbled upon?”

“Well, seeing as there are no piles of gold, no ceremonial headpieces, and no fancy sarcophagus, I'm guessing it's not a pharaoh. I'm also going to say it's not a queen, or even a priest. But, I think it's someone of importance, judging by my small knowledge of hieroglyphs. So, how close am I?”

Hermione turned around and looked at Harry. She had a smirk on her face, which was slowly turning into a smile. Walking away from the stone slab, she sauntered over to the emerald-eyed wizard. She placed her open palms on his chest, and slowly moved them up to his neck. Eventually, her fingers found themselves playing with the coal-colored locks that adorned the wizard's head.

Harry's arms had made their way around her waist, and pulled her in close. His hands played with the hem of her tank-top, and his fingers began to explore underneath. She shuddered at his light touch, and responded by kissing that spot on his neck. It was a promise to continue their libidinous activities later.

"I just have one question. Who are you and what have you done with my husband? Because he couldn't possibly have deduced such a conclusion from the evidence presented. Otherwise, I'd have no purpose here, other than looking... what was it? Oh yes, dead sexy; that was it."

A sly grin was forming on her face as she saw his reaction to both her special kiss, and the petting of his ego. After the past couple years, their playfulness and light teasing had increased ten fold. Though they kept the most salacious activities locked in their bedroom, they certainly liked the constant reminder of just how much they loved, and for that matter, lusted after, each other. What made everything much more intense was that they had given all of themselves to each other; mind, body and soul.

Harry smiled, and fought hard to beat back the onrushing desire for the brown-haired woman in his arms. He gave her a light kiss on the forehead, followed by a trail of small kisses down her cheek. He stopped when his mouth was near her ear, and whispered, "Your husband is right here..." causing her to shudder involuntarily.

With her lips now next to his ear, she replied in a very low and husky voice, "You are so evil... and you know we have a job to finish."

Harry chuckled, and said, "Mood killer."

"I'd rather have a rain cheque, thank you very much. Perhaps if you're good, I can show you something I picked up a couple days ago that I'd thought you'd like. It's something different, but I think you'll like it."

"Can't wait, love. But... like always... you're right... we do have a job to do. So... as much as I'd love to continue, we need to start actually doing what we're supposed to be doing."

After their open flirtations, Harry and Hermione resumed examining the chamber, Hermione taking very thorough notes. She jotted down her hypothesis; that this was the earliest evidence of dental surgery. When they finished, they emerged from the tomb, reporting to their boss the amazing find down below. Their boss sent a collection team back in, and sent the pair home for the day.

They arrived back at the apartment they were renting in Cairo, and immediately started to resume their activities from earlier in the tomb. Unfortunately for them, they didn't get very far, and in fact, were in for a rougher night than they had bargained for.

A large, tawny owl began to peck furiously on their one window. The couple separated, and Harry stomped over to let the bird in. He threw open the window in frustration, wanting very much to go back to the fun activity he was enjoying just moments before. He took the letter from the owl, and slammed the window shut. The offended owl took off in a huff, upset he didn't get a treat from the ungrateful human. Harry unrolled the parchment, and began to read.

Dear Mr. And Mrs. Potter,

This letter has been sent due to the unfortunate passing of Mrs. Andromeda Black-Tonks on Friday, the 14th of June, 2002.

You have been sent this letter because you are the godparents of Ted Remus Lupin. Your presence is required at Gringotts Wizarding Bank of London on Friday, the 21st of June, 2002, to either claim custody of Ted Remus Lupin, or relinquish your right to the child. Ted Remus Lupin is currently in custody of Walter and Rose Granger, with whom the child was staying due to Mrs. Black-Tonks sudden illness.

Our condolences,

Snartooth, Head of Wills, Testaments, Inheritance, and Intestacy

Harry read the letter three times. His heart fall into his stomach, and felt as though someone kicked him square in the gut. He stumbled backward, falling into the old, ratty love-seat they had bought.

Hermione, who had been of one mind for the past five minutes, switched gears immediately when she saw Harry fall back onto the couch, clutching the letter they had just received. She rushed over, throwing herself onto the couch beside Harry, her heart pounding out of fear and concern of what was in the letter.

“What is it?” she croaked out. She saw the tears falling from his eyes as he held out the letter for her. She snatched it from his grasp, and began to read. When she finished, she threw her arms around her husband, and he responded in kind. They both held onto each other, crying out of grief for both Andromeda and Teddy. They wept for hours, eventually succumbing to the sandman, falling asleep on the couch, their bodies worn out from the emotional turmoil.

“Unca Hawwy!” the excited three-year-old girl screamed when her chocolate eyes saw the gangly young-man walk through the door. In a streak of brown blurriness, she darted across the living room, and latched herself onto the leg of her brother-in-law.

“Hey Hand-basket!” he replied; a grin on his face, the first real one he had had in two days. “How are you?” Harry rubbed Helena's back and patted her head.

“Good,” was her only reply. She was then tapped on the shoulder, and she snapped her head around. Her brown eyes met a very similar set of orbs. Helena gasped, and lunged at her older sister, throwing her small arms around her neck.

“Huhminee!” she squealed as she was picked up.

“Oh my goodness, Mini-Me! You're getting so big! You're almost getting too big for your big sister to hold you. I think Uncle Harry needs to be a good boy and hold you. Don't you agree Helena?”

The little girl nodded enthusiastically, and she began to squirm in Hermione's arms, trying to free herself to go over to her second-favorite male. Harry saw this, and took the Hand-basket in his arms.

He gave his sister-in-law that nickname the day she was born. After being told her name was Helena, the first thought in his brain was, 'Hand-basket. Helena. Hell in a Hand-basket. Ha!' Much to Hermione's chagrin, he kept up with the nickname, and the littlest Granger fell in love with Harry after that.

As Helena started to grow, her appearance closely resembled that of Hermione's when she was her age. When Rose showed Hermione two pictures, one of her and one of Helena at the same age, there was no doubt as to the nickname she would give her little sister. And so, Helena was christened as Mini-Me. As the little girl started to get older, she took on more and more of her older sister's attributes; the brown, bushy-hair, the deep-chocolate eyes, the intense love of books. The only question that remained was if she would also follow her sister into the magical world.

“Hello sweetheart, I wish we were seeing each other under better circumstances,” Rose Granger said to her eldest daughter as she entered the room. The two embraced before she turned her attention to her son-in-law, who she gave a light hug to as well, trying to avoid crushing the three-year-old in between them.

“Hello deary, I see you've got yourself an armful. Don't expect her to ask to be let down. She only does that with the females of the family. You and her father however, she could stay with for eternity. I dare say you've made quite the impression on the women in this family, Harry.”

“Yes well... there's just something about Granger girls I can't get enough of...” Harry said smiling before kissing on the cheek, in order: Helena, Hermione, and Rose. “So, where's the little monster?”



"He's out back playing tag with Victoire. I told all of them that you two were coming, and this little one," Rose said, ruffling Helena's hair, "came right in and sat on the couch until you came through the door. She wouldn't pass up an opportunity with her Uncle Harry if her life depended on it."

Helena giggled, and buried her head into the crook of Harry's neck, much like Hermione did when they laid down together. Harry chuckled, and squeezed the little one in his arms gently. He kissed her on the top of her head before responding to Rose.

"I think she realizes that she's got me wrapped around her finger, at least that's the only rational explanation I can come up with," Harry said, smiling brightly at the bundle of joy in his arms. "Hey Hand-basket, do you want to go play with Teddy and Victoire now? We have to talk to your Mum about something, so why don't you go play with them?"

"Kay Unca Hawwy," Helena said as Harry set her down. Within a split second, she was off to the back yard to play with her friends. After she disappeared, Rose brought some tea into the living room, and the three of them sat down to talk.

"So, are you two going to take Teddy?" Rose asked bluntly, getting right to the heart of the matter.

Harry and Hermione looked at each other, and Harry nodded at her, imploring her to go first. "Well Mum, I'm not sure. I don't know if we're ready. I think I'm ready mentally to start our family, but what about our finances, jobs? We don't even have a place to raise him. Plus we're not done with our training in Egypt. There are so many things to consider. It's so hard Mum..." Hermione finished, burying her face in her hands.

Rose sighed, and looked at Harry. "How do you feel Harry? Do you have the same reservations?"

Harry looked between his wife and his mother-in-law, and shook his head. "Honestly, no, I don't," he said with a shrugging of his shoulders. "But, I've always been the impulsive one. I tend to rush

into things without thinking things through. I think we should take him as soon as possible and figure things out later. I don't want to risk him growing up like I did, in a household where he isn't surrounded by people that love him.

"Hermione doesn't want me to bring this up, but I'm going to..." Hermione glared at him, but remained silent. "She doesn't want to ask for help. She wants us to do it on our own. She wants to be self-sustaining. But if it comes down to it, I know that you and Walter, Arthur and Molly, Bill and Fleur, and even Ron and Padma would be willing to help us with Teddy until then. That's why I want to do this right now, because I've learned that we have a support system in place. We don't have to do this alone. And I don't think it would take us too long to get on our feet and on our own. In fact, I spent a good deal of time yesterday trying to do just that."

Hermione cocked her head at Harry. "You what? What were you doing while I was at the Ministry? You said it was to avoid all the attention. What did you do?"

Harry let a smile grow on his face, realizing he'd finally been able to plan and execute something without her knowledge. "Well, a lot actually. My first stop was actually Hogwarts. I talked to Headmistress McGonagall, and she happens to think that she'll have two open positions on staff this year. Coincidentally, it's DADA and Charms. Professor Flitwick wants to retire, and has for many years. And Auror Proudfoot doesn't really like teaching, so McGonagall has been keeping an eye out for anyone who wants the job. So..."

Harry was cut off by a lunging Hermione Potter, who clamped her mouth over his, effectively shutting down any verbal communication, which caused the both of them to fall deep into the cushions of the couch. Rose chuckled at the reaction of her eldest daughter, while simultaneously blushing furiously, watching her grown-up little girl throw herself onto her husband. After several long seconds of snogging, Rose caught their attention by doing a very good impression of Dolorus Umbridge. "Hem-hem!"

Suddenly, Hermione sprang off Harry, acting as though the mere touch of his skin caused her physical pain. Sitting back up, her face

completely red, she smiled sheepishly as Harry dug himself out of the cushions, a stupid grin plastered on his face.

Harry took a few seconds to regain his composure before continuing. "As I was saying, the Headmistress said that the positions are ours if we want them."

Hermione was now beaming. "Oh Harry! That's wonderful! I can't believe you did that. You know how much I admire Headmistress McGonagall, and to actually work with her would be a dream come true. Me, a Hogwarts professor. Wow..." she said, drifting off into a daydream, a daydream where she was standing in front of her first-year Charms class, explaining the long 'oh' sound in Leviosa.

Rose and Harry could only chuckle at the dreamy expression on Hermione's face. 'You know, I never thought I'd see the day that the patented, dreamy expression of Luna Lovegood would adore my lovely wife's face,' Harry thought to himself. He turned to Rose, and saw the same amused look on her face that he was sure was on his.

"So Rose, do you think she'd like to hear the rest of what I have to say, or would she rather daydream about her new job?"

"What other news do you have to share, deary?"

"Oh... not much. Just that I found a place to live in Hogsmeade."

Dead silence...

Then...

"WHAT?!"

Harry smirked.

"Hogsmeade. Place. To. Live."

Hermione was blinking repeatedly, gobsmacked, at her husband, unsure if she heard what she thought she heard. She sat there, frozen in place. She couldn't believe her ears. Was this some weird

dream she was going to wake up from? Did something really happen in the past couple days that she wasn't aware of? And was Harry responsible for it? Did he really get them jobs and a place to live on impulse, when she was worrying about planning it all? This man, her husband, the love of her life, the most important person to her for the last eleven years almost, had done the near impossible.

"Harry?" she said weakly, her voice dripping in disbelief. Her shock was not dissipating as the seconds wore on. Her eyes showed a reluctance to grab on to this wonderful set of circumstances that had been laid out before her.

It was a dream of hers to teach at Hogwarts. Harry had delivered that. It was a dream of hers to raise their children in a place of their own. And it seemed that Harry had delivered that as well.

Harry reached out and grabbed her hand, giving it a gently squeeze. "I knew you would worry about everything, and I figured the best way to deal with it all, was to just go ahead and do it. Being Harry Potter has its advantages. You know I don't like most aspects of being me, but sometimes, it comes in handy. Like when finding a beautiful house on the outskirts of Hogsmeade, so that we can live near the castle, raise Teddy and our own children, and live peacefully," Harry said, smiling at his wife.

"Harry, you're bloody amazing!" Hermione exclaimed. She threw her arms around his neck, and pulled him into a deep kiss, once again causing her mother to blush. Once they separated, Hermione had the biggest smile on her face that she had ever had.

"Well you two, I think it's time we tell Teddy the good news. I'm sure that the both of you will be wonderful parents. Speaking of which, now that you've decided on raising Teddy, when will the little Potter's be running around this house?" Rose asked.

Both Harry and Hermione blushed at her frankness. They had discussed the possibility of starting their family many, many times. But when the situation with Teddy came up, the issue was staring them directly in the face.

Harry looked between the two women in the room, and decided to voice his opinion, one that had been at the forefront of his thoughts for the past two days. "I think that with us taking Teddy in, it would be the perfect time to start our family. I know we haven't finished our training in Egypt, but I think this takes precedent. I really, really want to start our family now. And I hope that you do too, Hermione."

Hermione sat there, the smile from earlier still on her face. This had turned into quite a day. It started without her having a job, a place to live, or Teddy in her care. Now, she was sitting here with an offer to teach Charms at Hogwarts, a house to live in, and a four-year-old to take care of. On top of that, her husband was asking her to start their family soon. She only had one response.

"I think it's a wonderful idea."

Minerva McGonagall sat in her office, the Headmistress' office, at Hogwarts. She reflected on the meeting she had just yesterday concerning two of her favorite students. She was more than happy to help Harry and Hermione Potter. To have these two fine young people on her staff would be a boon to the school.

She thought of all the adventures Harry had been through during his days at the school, and thought of how perfect he was for the position of DADA professor. She smiled, thinking of when he taught his fellow students during his fifth year. She knew then that Harry would be an excellent teacher, and was proud of the fact that he was going to take up the position. She had a feeling that he would be at Hogwarts for many, many years.

If there was one student Headmistress McGonagall would choose as her favorite, there would be no doubt as to who she would choose. Hermione was a dedicated student, and was able to help both her friends throughout school. Smart, hard worker, diligent, loyal, dedicated; all words that would describe Hermione Potter.

The Headmistress was pulled out of her thoughts by a knocking at her door. "Come in," she said.

The door swung open, and in walked two of her professors, Filius Flitwick and Patrick Proudfoot. Minerva motioned for them to sit down, and both did so without saying a word. Professor Proudfoot looked uneasy, acting like a school boy who was in trouble. Professor Flitwick looked tired, like he was just woken up by the summons to the Headmistress' office.

“Thank you for coming on such short notice. I have some big news to share with the both of you. It appears as though I've found replacements for the both of you.”

Filius looked stunned. This was certainly news he was not expecting for at least another couple of years. He had several candidates in mind to replace him, but one stood out above all others. Curious, he asked, “May I inquire as to just who you've found as our successors, Minerva?”

“Who cares? Just as long as this prat actually takes the job. We are talking about this term correct? I'm tired of dealing with these little brats. You know, when I took this job, I was supposed to be here for a year. It's turned into four bloody years! I never wanted this! Just tell me they've accepted the post so I can go back to my real job, catching criminal wizards!” Proudfoot complained.

Minerva looked upon Proudfoot with disdain. Her eyes were fierce, narrowed, and glaring at her... former... DADA professor. Slowly, as the thought of just who was replacing him crossed her mind, the right side of her mouth rose. The effect was amazing; it was simply a look of pure contempt. Her eyes glowering, her mouth slightly cocked, forming a ruthless smirk. For once, she decided not to hold back, thinking how wonderful it would feel to say what she was thinking, she let loose.

“Professor Proudfoot, you should feel quite honored, because when the next edition of Wizard's Pursuit comes out, you'll be in it.”

Proudfoot immediately perked up, wondering just how it was possible. “What do you mean, Minerva?”

“Oh, when your name is plastered on the back of a card? You'll be the answer to a simple question. And that is... Who was the DADA professor at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry before Harry Potter?”

Both the gentlemen in front of her had their jaws drop, stunned at what they just heard. Filius was the first to recover. “Harry Potter, Minerva? I know he lead that group back in his fifth year, but DADA professor?”

“Filius, name me a person who is better suited for the position? The boy has been through more in his life than most of the Aurors, including the one we have on staff,” she said, staring icily at Proudfoot.

Proudfoot sat dumbfounded, before his confusion turned to seething anger. “What? That attention seeking brat? He's my replacement? Ha! I have more skill in my left pinkie than he does his entire body. But if that's what it takes to me out of this Merlin forsaken place, then so be it,” he spat.

“Just because you can't stand the fact that someone half your age has twice your skill, doesn't mean you have the right to besmirch his good name, Mr. Proudfoot. The only reason you were given the position is because you couldn't weasel your way into the good graces of our current Minister like you had previously done! You were, quite plainly, a stooge for both Fudge and Scrimgeour. That's the only way you got to where you are, not because of your abilities! Now, get out of my office, pack your things, and never step foot in my school again!” Minerva demanded.

Auror Proudfoot stood up quickly, knocking over the chair he was sitting in. He spun around, and walked out of the Headmistress' office, slamming the door behind him. He didn't see the dual looks of satisfaction that crossed both Minerva and Filius' faces. Both professors shared a laugh, and continued their conversation.

“Well Minerva, I don't believe you answered my question as to who you found to replace me. I am certainly happy to hear that Mr. Potter will be returning to Hogwarts, but my curiosity is getting the better of

me, I'm afraid. That, or the prospect of an actual retirement," Flitwick said with a smile.

"I think you'll be happy with your replacement, Filius. As it were, I was able to find both a new DADA professor and your replacement in one fell swoop. They came as a packaged deal. I got not only Mr. Potter, but Mrs. Potter as well. Hermione will take over as Charms professor as soon as you're ready for retirement, old friend."

Filius Flitwick had rarely had the type of smile that was on his face right now, hearing the news that one of his most prized students would be taking over for him. "Splendid, Minerva. Splendid, indeed. If it would please you, I would like to teach one more year. But, I would welcome Mrs. Potter as my assistant for the year, to both ease her into the position, and to make sure she doesn't go overboard on the students. I remember her assignments very well, and I would be afraid of the work load she would thrust upon the students."

Minerva chuckled at his assessment of the former Miss Granger, and nodded. "I tend to agree with you on that point, and I think Hermione would do well to be your understudy. Harry, on the other hand, does have experience teaching students, and judging by the OWL and NEWT scores of his group, can do it quite well. I will be hosting Mr. and Mrs. Potter in a few days time. Would you like to be there?"

"Most certainly."

Harry paced back and forth in front of the large, oak desk in the DADA classroom. To say he was nervous would be an understatement. This was his first day on the job, his first class, and unfortunately, they were seventh years. First years he could handle. They could barely remember the days of Voldemort. They wouldn't ask him questions about it, at least in the detail that their older house mates would. They would be wide-eyed little firsties. Not wide-eyed, teen-aged seventh years, who would remember the fall of Voldemort and The Battle at Hogwarts.

He did have a plan going into class today. He would do something to them that would get their attention. He knew it would be mean, but he felt it was his duty to prepare them against the nastiest and most



awful wizards alive. This was after all, Defense Against the Dark Arts. He spent nearly everyday, since accepting the job, with Hermione planning out his lessons for the year. They had decided that starting off the year with a bang was just what the medic called for.

Both Harry and Hermione had talked at length with Headmistress McGonagall about the lesson plan of Auror Proudfoot. The couple knew that drastic action needed to be taken, especially with the older students. They had suffered from lackluster professors since they had entered school. This was the class who had Umbridge as their DADA teacher in their first year. Then came Severus Snape, a hero in the war, but a disgrace to the word "teacher". After that, came Amycus Carrow, a true Death Eater through and through. Thankfully, that year was repeated. And for the past four years, they were subjected to Proudfoot.

Patrick Proudfoot did not embrace teaching. He despised it. Detested it. Loathed it. He disliked the little brats he had to deal with on a daily basis, five days a week, ten months out of the year. He didn't even bother to try and remember their names. It was pointless. The ones that acted so smart, the ones thought that they were smarter than he was, were a nuisance. The ones that didn't care, were a waste of time. The best students, in his opinion, were the ones that came in, sat down, shut up, did their work, and performed well without his interference.

Harry knew he had to catch these kids up on everything that they had missed. It would take hard work on their part. He needed to find out whether or not they really wanted it. He needed to separate out those who were there to learn and achieve, from those who were there because their teacher was going to be Harry Potter.

The first few students walked into the classroom, a group of Ravenclaws, and promptly sat in the first row, front and center. Harry stopped pacing the moment they entered the room, walking to the middle of his desk, and leaned back up against it. He folded his arms across his chest, and let his head droop down, giving the impression that he was nodding off to sleep. Soon, the rest of the seventh years filled up the room, all sitting silently, wondering why the great Harry Potter looked to be asleep.

After a minute or so of silence, the students began to whisper amongst themselves. It didn't take long for the conversations to go from whispers to normal volume. Harry stood there, eyes closed, listening to them banter about. With their attentions elsewhere, he struck.

Harry grabbed his wand, and began shooting off hexes as fast as he could, not aiming at anyone in particular. The students in the front were the first to be hit. Two Ravenclaw girls had been knocked to the floor, their hair now a florescent pink, reminiscent of the late Nymphadora Tonks-Lupin. Two Slytherin boys, who were to the right of the girls, were knocked out of their chairs. They began flinging their arms around wildly as their hair grew absurdly long, engulfing their bodies, both now looking like overgrown Cousin Its.

One by one, student after student fell victim to hexes tossed around by Professor Potter. The hexes had sent the kids dashing behind any cover they could find; be it a desk, a chair, or even other students. Finally, after two-thirds of the students had been hit, a loud cry of, "Protego!" rang throughout the room.

With that simple scream, a thin, blueish-yet-transparent shield spang up around one of the students. Immediately, Harry stopped his assault, and looked around the room, trying to locate the caster. Soon his eyes found what they were looking for, and he allowed himself to smile, but just a small one.

"Your name and house, Miss...?" Professor Potter asked the young lady.

With a trembling voice, she replied, "Rose Zeller, Hufflepuff, sir."

"Miss Zeller, take 20 points for Hufflepuff for an excellent Protego shield. And may I say, you have a lovely first name," Harry said with a smile. The blond, seventh year 'Puff blushed at the compliment. "My mother-in-law is named Rose, so I'm rather partial to the name, Miss Zeller. Everyone, have a seat. And for those of you who were hexed... Finite Incantatem!"

As the students took their seats, Harry stalked the front of the room, his demeanor changing on a knut. He was obviously not in a good mood after his sneak attack. The displeasure was radiating off him in waves. He turned to face his students, and with a most un-Harry-like look, snarled at them.

“Now, as for the rest of you. If I may borrow a line from an old Potions professor of mine, that was pathetic you dunderheads! Most of you were hit, a good number of you didn't even draw your wands, and some of you flobberworms hid behind your fellow students! Ab. So. Lute. Lee. Pah. Th-eh. Tick. If I were a Death Eater, most of you would be dead by now. And I don't want to hear the excuse of, 'Well, you caught us unaware!' Constant Vigilance!” Harry finished, pounding his fist onto his desk. The entire class jumped in their seats, startled by the sudden noise.

Everyone in the room stared at their new professor, disbelieving the sight before them. Many were expecting this first class to be fun. They expected to be regaled by the stories of Harry Potter, told by the man himself. They were looking forward to hearing about his adventures. What they got instead, was a tongue-lashing.

“You lot were supposed to be the best this school had to offer. All of you passed your OWL's with at least an E, otherwise you couldn't be here. This class will not be Harry Potter 101. This will be Defense Against the Dark Arts, NEWT level. If you aren't willing to work hard, then I suggest you don't come back for the next class. I have one year to fix everything that's wrong with you. And trust me, knowing who your previous professors were, you're one messed up bunch.

“This class will be split into two parts. During this scheduled time period, will be the lecture portion of the course. The second part will take place independently, outside class time. You will be divided up by house, and each house will have a practical lesson once per week. This. Is. Mandatory. We will all meet on Fridays as a group, bringing the total number of practicals to two per week for each house. These lessons will take place at night, and take precedent over everything, including Quidditch. This shouldn't be much of a problem, seeing as I will be getting together with the four Captains, so that there will not be any conflicts.

"Now, since I have no deep wanting to teach people who don't wish to be here, I'm dismissing class early. I don't want to waste my time lecturing to those who don't want to work hard. Alright, with the exception of Miss Zeller... Class dismissed."

Everyone looked tentatively at Rose, whose eyes were now as big as saucers. The class slowly shuffled out of the room, still licking their wounds from the assault and subsequent dressing-down. Rose however, remained riveted to her seat. After everyone left, Harry walked over to the young Hufflepuff. She was still wide-eyed, staring at her professor.

Harry chuckled at her, and said, "Its okay Miss Zeller, you can relax, you're not in trouble."

"Um... okay... Professor Potter..." she replied nervously. "What do you want, sir?"

"Miss Zeller, you had the highest score on the DADA OWL since... well... myself and my wife. It was no great surprise to me that it was you who cast the first shielding spell. I was a little disappointed that it took you so long to do so, but I'm willing to let that little detail slide, for now.

"The reason I asked you to stay behind is that I wanted to ask you something. I want each house to have a designated DADA expert, someone that the younger students can go to with questions. Also, this person will lead their house in the practicals. I may be the teacher, but I feel that a fellow student should be the leader. I'm still undecided on the other three houses, but after today, I know for sure that I want you to be that person for Hufflepuff. That is if you're willing to take on the responsibility."

The 'Puff sat there, dumbfounded, unable to formulate a response. Her mind was still reeling from what Harry had said to her.

"Miss Zeller?"

Finally, the fog lifted from her brain, and she said shyly, "Yes Professor, I'd love too."

"Good. Now, your first assignment as the leader of Hufflepuff, is to try and convince every other seventh year Badgers to keep up with this class. While I'm not requiring you to get them all to come, I am asking that you at least try and change their minds, assuming that there are any in your house that are planning on dropping the class. Understood?"

"Yes sir."

"Very well. You're dismissed."

Hermione Potter stood over the stove, flipping over the chicken that was frying in the pan. It was a delicacy she had picked up while in America. She never had fried chicken before, but since encountering the delectable dish, both she and Harry couldn't get enough of it. And when Teddy first got his hands on a golden-brown drumstick, he devoured the tasty leg piece faster than Ron ever could.

As she stood there, frying up dinner for her husband and godson, she pondered how she was going to share the news that she had found out earlier that day. She and Harry had been arguing over her health for the past week. She had been feeling under the weather, and she wasn't improving. Harry was adamant that she visit St. Mungo's, but her stubbornness kept her from going. Finally, he was able to at least convince her to see Madam Pomfrey, seeing as she was going to be at Hogwarts anyway.

After her visit to the Hospital Wing, she asked Professor Flitwick if she could go home early, saying she wasn't feeling well, which was quite true. Since returning home, she had played with Teddy all day, to his immense enjoyment. They played games, and she had him read to her, which was fun for both of them.

Hermione was startled out of her thoughts by the sound of the front door slamming shut. Footsteps made their way from the living room, towards the kitchen, growing louder as they approached. She turned her head to face the entranceway, and saw her smiling husband

looking at her. She returned his smile, then turned her attention back to the chicken.

“How was your first day, Harry?” Hermione asked, flipping over a drumstick.

“It couldn't have gone any better if I had done it 100 times. Our plan worked with the seventh years. Got their attention real good, that's for sure...” Harry said before turning his attention to the four-year-old sitting at the kitchen table. He walked over to the young boy, and gave him a big hug. “Hey Teddy! How's it going, you little monster?”

Teddy hugged his godfather back enthusiastically. “Good. Auntie Hermione says I'm a fast reader! Are you a fast reader Uncle Harry?”

Harry pulled away from Teddy, and smiled down at him. “No I'm not little guy. I'm not nearly as fast a reader as Hermione. I think you'll be as fast as her when you get older.” Hearing the praise from Harry, Teddy beamed. “Now, why don't you set the table for us while I go help with the cooking?”

“Okay Uncle Harry,” Teddy said while sliding off the chair. As he went to go get the silverware, Harry walked over and put his arms around his wife, and kissed her neck lightly.

“So Miss Sicky, what's Poppy's diagnosis?” Harry inquired.

Hermione let out a long sigh, not sure how to answer. So instead, she took one of his hands, and began to rub her belly with it. As she did so, a large smile spread across her face.

“I have some good news, and some bad news. Bad news is: I'm going to be sick for a little while longer.”

Harry, not really aware of what she was doing his hand, but enjoying it nonetheless, frowned at the news she shared. “And what's the good news?”

Hermione turned her head, and kissed him on the cheek. With her lips close to his ear, she whispered...

"We're going to have a baby, my love."

A/N: Alrighty! Chapter 9 in the books. By the way Mutatus Vita roughly translated means "Change in the way of life", which I certainly believe fits this chapter. Also, I tried making Helena's speech patterns as close to a three-year-olds as I could. Not having children of my own, nor have I ever had any real interactions with them, leads me to a lot of speculation on this. If this is way off, please let me know, whether the speech be better or worse. I looked at child development web sites and tried to fit her speech with a "typical" three-year-old pattern. Same with Teddy.

Anyway, thanks for reading! I don't know when chapter 10 will be done. A lot is going on in my life right now, and finding time to write is becoming increasingly difficult. Thank you for being patient with me! See you next time!

## Chapter 10: September 1st, 2017

Harry Potter sat in his new chair, nervous. His foot was tapping quickly, echoing throughout the hall. His hands were rubbing his face raw. He looked about, taking in the familiar surroundings. But this time, it was different. He knew that from now on, things were going to be up to him. He was alone, for now. As he leaned into the high-backed chair, he reflected on his life, and the events that had lead him to sitting in this chair, right here, right now.

“Push Mrs. Potter! Push!” yelled the medi-witch.

“I AM pushing you wench! Ahhhh!” Hermione screamed in agony. “Harry! I hate you! Why did I let you talk me out of the pain numbing potions!?!?!?”

Harry sat at her bedside, sweating profusely. He couldn't feel his hand. He surmised that he probably would never feel anything with his left hand ever again. He knew for sure, even though he was rubbish with healing spells, that every bone in his hand was crushed into nothing more than dust. But he sat there, trying his best to ignore the throbbing pain coming from the extremity. The only thing he was thankful for in that circumstance was his decision NOT to use his wand hand to comfort his wife.

“Hermione, love, I believe I tried talking you IN to using...”

“You didn't try hard enough you prat! Ahhhhhh!” Hermione unceremoniously cut him off.

Harry winced, knowing that his logical and rational explanation was lost on his screaming wife.

“Almost there Mrs. Potter! Mr. Potter, would you like to see your child being born?” the medi-witch asked calmly.

Harry, unsure what he would see, agreed. Hermione released his hand, and he shook it without thinking, trying to get some sort of feeling back in it. He walked behind the medi-witch, watching and waiting in nervous anticipation for the arrival of their child.



Being the savior of the wizarding world, Harry was expected to be able to face anything, without fear. So when Harry saw something peeking out of his wife, no one in the room expected him to bat an eyelash. Harry, on the other hand, had no such illusions of himself. When he saw his child begin to emerge from his wife, he did what every great and powerful man would.

He fainted.

The resulting crash sent half of the staff to tend after Harry. The largest medi-wizard in the room dragged him over to a chair, and sat him as upright as he could.

Hermione, mid-birthing, looked over at her unconscious husband, and glared. "You pansy! You wimp! Ahhhh!"

Several minutes later, the medi-wizard enervated Harry, and he woke up startled. He looked around the room, and noticed that the chaos that had engulfed the room was no longer there.

"Good to see you're awake, Mr. Potter. Your wife was gracious enough to tell us the name you had picked before she passed out. Let me be the first to congratulate you on your son, James Sirius Potter, born at 5:28pm, on April 30th, 2003."

Harry smiled, thinking of his eldest child. He was entering his fourth year at Hogwarts. The young man looked like the perfect combination of Harry and Hermione, which meant young James looked a lot like his paternal grandfather and namesake. The messy-black hair, tall, slender build, and smart as a whip. The only difference between Harry's son and Harry's father, was that the son had the same chocolate-colored eyes as his mother.

James tended to take after his mother in many ways, but had his father's love of Quidditch. He was in line for Gryffindor prefect in his fifth year, and was the Quidditch team's star chaser.

For James' 11th birthday, Harry gave him what is to this day his favorite gift: a Weasley Whisper X. The Weasley Whisper X was quite

simply the fastest broom ever made. No broom on the market could compete with its top speed, quick acceleration, and ability to turn on a knut. All of that however, was not what made the broom special to James. What James loved about the broom was the inscription on the handle: "To James, may the next Potter fly faster than the last, Love Uncle Ron".

There is something to be said about the bond between father and daughter. This was certainly evident in the relationship between Harry and his only little girl, Lily Rose Potter, his second child.

On June 24th, 2004, little Lily Potter came screaming into the world, and her mouth hadn't closed since. She was the fastest to walk, fastest to talk, first to finish *Hogwarts: A History*. Lily took mostly after her mother; brown-bushy hair, insatiable love of books, no talent for Quidditch, and stubborn as a mule. Her only discernible trait she had inherited from her father was the bright, emerald eyes.

Lily was now entering her third year. Hermione was always afraid that Lily would follow too closely in her own footsteps, and feel like an outcast because of her intelligence when she came to Hogwarts. But all those fears were for not, as Lily fit right in as a student. At first, there were a lot of girls who wanted to be her friend because her last name was Potter. Lily, however, saw right through the fakers. She formed a couple of true friendships, like her mother had, with two boys. She always said she got on better with boys, "Because I have to deal with them at home, and most girls are into fashion and gossip. Ugh! And let's not even talk about the Weasley's!"

Harry chuckled, as memories of his daughter were going on in his thoughts. Much like her aunt, Helena Granger, Lily had the most famous wizard alive wrapped around her finger. With every batting of her eyelashes, Harry's willpower would melt on the spot, and whatever little Lily wanted, she usually got.

The door to the side chamber of the Great Hall slowly creaked open, and crept in Professor Hermione Potter. She saw her husband sitting down, apparently deep in thought, and decided to walk over to him. Her steps echoed throughout the empty hall, but Harry didn't seem to

notice. When she was close to him, she reached out her hand and touched his shoulder.

Caught unaware, Harry flinched, and looked sharply to his left. What he saw was the smiling face of his wife. He clutched his chest, feigning a heart attack.

"Hermione! I'm getting too old for that! Merlin be damned!"

"Oh, knock it off 'old man'" Hermione replied mockingly, using air quotations around "old man". "The students are almost here. Is it alright if I send the staff in? I have to go and address the first years before they come in. I'm excited to see where the twins end up."

"Ya, me too. I bet that George and Angelina are expecting them to be in Gryffindor. Fred I'm sure will be, but Roxanne? She might be a Ravenclaw. Reminds me a bit of the Patil's."

"Oh ya, a Weasley not in Gryffindor? And what are the chances of that happening?" Hermione replied, chuckling as she spoke.

Harry laughed along with her, realizing that she was right. "I suppose you're right. Again," he said, smiling. "Can't wait until little Mammy gets sorted next year."

Hermione huffed, exasperated with her husband. "You know he hates it when you call him Mammy. Mamillius is his name, just like my name is not Hermy, its Hermione. Honestly, Harry!"

Mamillius Ronald Potter was born April 2nd, 2007. The youngest child, and second son, of the Potters, was easily the shyest among them. Even growing up with lots of friends, he still kept to himself. He inherited Hermione's brown hair and brown eyes, but his hair was as wild as Harry's. He liked to read, but not as much as Lily. He liked to play Quidditch, but wasn't as good as James. Of all the kids growing up, it was Mamillius who liked Muggle technology the most. His mother started his fascination when she gave him a handheld video game device for his birthday when he was 6.

"I know, I know," Harry said, putting his hands up in defeat. "Anyway, send in the staff. Send in Victoire and Mr. Wood as well, please."

"Of course, Headmaster," Hermione replied, smirking, as she walked towards the entrance to the Great Hall, her footsteps echoing loudly.

Harry sat there glaring at her, in a non-malicious way, for her flippant use of the term "Headmaster". He was still getting used to the title. The former Headmistress, Pomona Sprout, had hand-picked Harry to be her successor. He tried on several occasions to get her to choose someone else, but Harry changed his mind when all the other professors refused to take up the position. His first action as Headmaster was to make Hermione the Deputy Headmistress; not that was a surprise to any of the other professors.

Much to Harry's disappointment, he was forced to give up his duties as Defense Against the Dark Arts professor. Teaching, he discovered, was one of his great passions, along with his family, and flying. He did, however, promise himself that he would still teach the Practical Defense lab that he had started many years ago. At the time, it was a radical thought to have a separate time for a practical application of DADA. But since he introduced it his first year as a professor, all the students had loved it.

The doors to the Great Hall swung open, and the staff walked in. Harry made eye contact with most of the staff. He smiled at his long-time friend and colleague, Herbology Professor Neville Longbottom, and his first friend, Professor Rubeus Hagrid. Hagrid now taught a N.E.W.T. level class, specializing in dangerous beasts, which was separate from the normal Care of Magical Creatures class. He nodded at the other members of the staff, which included some hold-over's from when Harry was a student, and some which had been hired after he had. There was one professor however that was new to Hogwarts, at least in a teacher capacity. She was his replacement as DADA professor, and she was Harry's first hire, former Auror-Captain Rose Zeller.

Following the professors were Head Boy and Girl, Charlie Wood and Victoire Weasley. Harry waved over the two, and smiled at them. "Hello to the new Head Boy and Girl."

"Hello, Uncle Harry. Nervous?" Victoire, the vivacious blonde, asked.

Harry chuckled at his niece-in-all-but-blood. "Ya, a little V. How are you?"

"Good. I know I've got big shoes to fill. Helena raised the bar for us all."

"She did indeed. How's the family, Charlie?"

"Good, Professor. Dad says hi, and that the invitation to any game you want to go to still stands."

"Thanks. I still think Ollie holds it against me that I turned him down after the '08 Quidditch World Cup."

Charlie laughed, and replied, "Dad still loves to tell the tale. Any time he has some Firewhiskey in him, you can't stop him from regaling us about the story of the greatest seeker he every played with, the great Harry Potter. I can't tell you how many times I've heard about the '08 World Cup and how you came out of retirement for it. 'First time in 100 years England's won the Cup!' dad would always say at end the story."

Harry laughed with the lad. "And I can't tell you how many times Ollie tried to sign me to Puddlemere after that. I seriously considered it, but I loved teaching too much. Anyway, I'll be making a big announcement after the feast. It may not be liked by some people, but I think it's necessary. I want you two to be my liaison to the students. I'll talk to you two privately after the feast about it."

The Head Boy and Girl looked at each other, and nodded. "I don't think that will be a problem, Uncle Harry. Anything that you believe in and want to implement, we'll support you," Victoire said while Charlie nodded in agreement.

“Wonderful. I see the rest of the students are coming in. I’ll let you two go be with your friends. Enjoy the feast.”

The two students smiled, and went straight to the Gryffindor table. Soon, Hermione led the first years into the Great Hall, and the sorting ceremony commenced. Harry wasn’t paying too much attention to the specific students until the end.

“Weasley, Fredrick!”

A mocha-skinned, dark red-haired little boy walked up to the stool, and Hermione plopped the Sorting Hat onto the boy’s head. Almost immediately, the Hat shouted, “GRYFFINDOR!”

Young Fred ripped off the Hat, and raced to sit down with all his friends and cousins. Hermione had one more name to read: “Weasley, Roxanne!”

Roxanne, who looked like a spitting image of Angelina, walked quickly, barely able to contain her excitement, and sat on the stool, where Hermione put the hat on her head. With Roxanne, the Hat took a long time to decide before settling on “GRYFFINDOR!”

As Roxanne ran over to sit next to her brother, Harry looked over to the Lion’s table, and saw many familiar faces cheering. He saw his own children, James and Lily, along with the new lions. With them were: Bill and Fleur’s children: Victoire, the Head Girl, Dominique, a 5th year female prefect, and Louie, a 2nd year; Percy and Audrey’s children: Molly, a 3rd year, and Lucy, a 2nd year; Ron and Padma’s children: Harry Arthur, a 6th year, Anandi Hermione, a 4th year, and Ranak Charles, a 3rd year.

After Hermione sat next to Harry, the feast began. Soon, the sounds of chattering voices were ringing throughout the hall; clanking forks and spoons, laughter and giggling. After a while, the voices grew louder, which seemed to signal the end of eating. Taking a deep breath, Harry stood up, and walked to the podium. When he did, all the sound that was bouncing off the walls suddenly stopped. All eyes became transfixed on the new Headmaster.

“First of all, I’d like to welcome all the returning students back, and to the new students, a warm welcome to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.” Harry was interrupted by a thunderous, spontaneous applause. A slight tinge of pink graced Harry’s cheeks at the sound of clapping. He swallowed nervously, and soon the noise died down, and he continued.

“My name is Harry Potter, and I am the new Headmaster here. I am humbled to be in this position, and I’ll do everything in my power to make sure each and every student that passes through these hallowed halls receives the best education possible. To that end, I am implementing a new educational program.

“All Muggle-born and Muggle-raised students will be enrolled in a mandatory class to help integrate them into the magical world. All students who were raised in a magical family will be enrolled in a mandatory class to educate them about Muggle culture. It is my hope that through these new classes, our society will grow closer together. I’m sure that there will be some resistance to this, but I want everyone to go into this with an open mind, and a willingness to try.”

Throughout the hall, there was a mixture of different reactions. Some were nodding in agreement, some seemed passive about it, and a slight minority seemed opposed to it. The memories of the last war were still prevalent all around them. The prejudice against the Muggles and the Muggle-born, plus the belief in blood supremacy were blamed for the last war. The past 20 years had done a lot to heal those wounds, but there was little progress in the society.

“We’ll be explaining the program in more detail in the coming days, so if you have questions, any of the professors, or the Head Boy and Girl, will be available to answer those questions.

“We also have a new Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher, an ex-Auror-Captain, Ms. Rose Zeller. Welcome back to Hogwarts, Professor,” Harry said as he turned and smiled at the new teacher. Professor Zeller waved as there was a spattering of applause.

“Anyway, enough of the ramblings of an old man. Let us begin another wonderful year at Hogwarts!” And with a loud cheer, all the students arose from their seats and made their way to their dorms.

After the students and most of the staff left, Harry and Hermione were walking to the Headmaster’s office and idly chatting, when Hermione pulled a piece of parchment out of her robes. “Did you see this, Harry?”

Harry cocked his eyebrow, took the parchment, and opened it. As he read it, a broad smile crept on his face.

Mr. and Mrs. Walter Granger,

Would like to announce the wedding of their daughter,

Helena Abigail Granger,

To the love of her life and fine young man,

Ted Remus Lupin,

On Sunday, October 22nd, 2017, at St. Michael & All Angels Church of England Church, Laughton, England, at 12:00pm.

Harry turned to his wife and kissed her on the cheek. “I guess the sons of the Marauders can’t help but fall for Granger girls.”

Hermione smiled. “Indeed. It’s amazing to think that they’ve been dating for three years. I think Remus and Tonks would be proud of the way Teddy’s grown up. He’s such a charming young man. I don’t know where he could have possibly learned it from!” she said teasingly.

“Me either,” Harry responded casually before Hermione swatted him in the shoulder. “Ready to go talk to the Head Boy and Girl?”

Hermione nodded, and the two of them walked to the Headmasters office. Harry ran his hands through his now salt-’n-pepper hair, revealing the lightning bolt scar that he was famous for. His finger ran



over it out of habit, tracing it from bottom to top. He smiled, as the scar had not pained him in over nineteen years, and all was well.

A/N part two. Well, I hope you like it. There are some things I'd like to say, now that this story has come to a completion, and some big thank you's.

First off, yes, I fully understood when I came up with Helena's name that her initials were H.A.G. I thought it was quite humorous, and I think it fit with the Granger genes that they have an interesting idea of how to name things. And if you're wondering, Mamillius is Hermione's son in "A Winter's Tale". I wanted something different, and I have yet to see that one!

To The Oh So Bored One: Thank you for being my beta for this story. You caught so many things I missed in these chapters; I was almost embarrassed to send them to you.

To born-literate: Thank you for your support while writing this story, hope you like the last chapter!

To everyone who reviewed: Thank you! You're all awesome! In the truest sense!

To old-crow: Thank you for your reviews, kind words, and inspiration. No Thanks, Thank you Ms. Bones, and An Inconvenient Truth are three of my favorite stories.

To witowsmp: Thank you for your reviews, honesty, and inspiration. I love Harry McGonagall, The Time Meddlers, and so many of your other stories! Reading your stories helped me find my muse again so that I could finish this story.

To Seel'vor: Thank you for your wonderful stories, HP and the Quantum Leap, The Real Us, and all your one-shots are amazing to read. I'm ashamed to admit that I'm a part of your group on Yahoo, and I love reading all the comments, but I just lurk. Please forgive me. Reading all your stories helped get me back in the writing mode, and helped me give off my ass and finish this story. Thank you.

To chem prof: Quite possibly the best writer I've read on here. Your stories inspired me from the beginning. Hermione's Plan, The Road Not Taken, Notebooks and Letters, and all the others are masterpieces to me. Thank you for helping get me back on track with my own story through your own excellent writing.

Now that this story is done, I don't know if I'll write more. I have a story idea, and if anyone wants to take it and run with it, then by all means! I'll be posting it as a one-shot, and if I feel the tug to write it all out, then I will. All I ask is if you want to use it as a springboard, I'd like a little shout out when you post it.

Thank you , and good day!